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# *Formally Educated First Nations Women in the Treaty Six Region of Alberta: In-group Social Acceptance and Support*

by

Tracey J. Poitras-Collins ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of *Master of Science*

In

*Rural Sociology*

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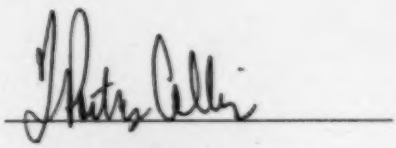

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# ABSTRACT

This study attempted to identify the in-group social acceptance and support networks of higher educated First Nations women in the Treaty Six region of Alberta. Eleven native women from various communities agreed to share their experiences both on and off reservations in the Treaty Six region. Using in-depth semi-structured long interviews, these women shared experiences and reflections regarding their support systems while obtaining a formal education, and levels of acceptance upon the completion of their formal education. The ages of the participants ranged from 24 - 61 years of age. Each participant currently or previously, within the past two years, worked with a Treaty Six organization or Indian reserve. The average income for the participants was $40,525.27. Occupations of the participants included social workers, teachers, researchers, cultural coordinators, directors of social programs, and regional home-care coordinators.

Their reasons for pursuing a formal education included a desire to improve their living conditions, to accommodate the expectations of family members, and some believed it was predetermined by a higher power, "The Creator". The participants in this study identified three main personal characteristics for academic success: stubbornness, individual pursuit of education for the whole family, and rebelliousness. The participants identified two main support systems as family and spiritual supports. Women in this study identified the role of formal education in Cree identity, and in the importance of goals for community development, that inspired their pursuit of higher education. Women's experiences in this study were varied in that some of them reported rejection upon their return and others reported acceptance. And this in turn influenced their employability on reserve and their commitment to stay.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Who would I like to thank... I would like to thank those who believed in me when at times I didn't believe in myself.

The women who placed their trust and faith in me, in hopes that I would be able to represent their experiences in a respectful manner, I am grateful to.

Our paths are predetermined, this is the wisdom of my elders, and I believe the completion of this thesis is part of mine. It is not to glorify who I am but to provide an avenue of learning for all who choose to see who we are. The main premise of this work is to address the continuing needs of Aboriginal people and to attempt to undo the damage we have suffered under the hands of well meaning people, but who did not try to understand and accept us as people, with a distinct and valuable culture, who can create a strong society of well-educated Cree people.

# FORMALLY EDUCATION FIRST NATIONS WOMEN IN THE TREATY SIX REGION OF ALBERTA: IN-GROUP SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND SUPPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS


CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ..... 1
- 1.1 Background and Statement of the Problem ..... 2
- 1.2 Objectives ..... 4
- 1.3 Guiding Theory ..... 5
- 1.4 Significance of the Study ..... 6
- 1.5 Research Design ..... 7
- 1.6 Strengths & Limitations ..... 9
- 1.7 Dissemination of Results ..... 10

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW ..... 11
- 2.1 History of Aboriginal Women ..... 12
- 2.2 First Nations Communities ..... 26
- 2.3 First Nations Women ..... 31
- 2.4 Formally Educated First Nations Women ..... 33
- 2.5 In-group Acceptance ..... 35
- 2.6 First Nations Women as Managers ..... 38
- 2.7 Conclusion ..... 40

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY ..... 43
- 3.1 Sample Description ..... 44
- 3.2 Instrumentation ..... 45
- 3.3 Procedures ..... 47
- 3.4 Time-line ..... 49
- 3.5 Data Analysis ..... 50
- 3.6 Limitations & Strengths ..... 53

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS ..... 55
- 4.1 Participant Description ..... 55
- 4.2 Self-reflection ..... 57
- 4.2.1 Personal Characteristics ..... 58
- 4.3 Support Systems ..... 62
- 4.4 The Role of Formal Education in Cree Identity ..... 66
- 4.5 Superordinate Goals and Priorities of Concern ..... 67
- 4.6 Acceptance ..... 71
- 4.7 No Acceptance ..... 74
- 4.8 Summary ..... 79

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION....80
5.1 THEORY DEVELOPMENT....80
5.2 THE ROLE OF EDUCATION....82
5.3 SUPPORT SYSTEMS....84
5.4 IN-GROUP NON-ACCEPTANCE....87
5.4.1 IN-GROUP ACCEPTANCE....90
5.5 POTENTIAL AREAS FOR EXPLORATION....93

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS....94
6.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS....94
6.2 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS....97
6.3 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS....99
6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS....100

REFERENCES....102

APPENDIXES
A CONSENT FORM....114
B INFORMATION SHEET....115
C INTERVIEW SHEET....116
D AGES OF PARTICIPANTS....119
E YEARLY INCOME OF PARTICIPANTS....120
F POST SECONDARY EDUCATION....121

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE A: RESEARCH TIME-LINE ..... 49

TABLE B: MARITAL STATUS ..... 56

TABLE C: CHILDHOOD RESIDENCE PATTERNS ..... 56

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: THEORY DEVELOPMENT ..... 81

FIGURE 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ..... 91

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|---|---|
| ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS | AFN |
| DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT | DIAND |
| FIRST NATIONS ACCOUNTABILITY COALITION | FNAC |
| FIRST NATIONS MESSENGER | FNM |
| INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS CANADA | INAC |
| NATIONAL FIRST NATIONS GENDER EQUALITY SECRETARIAT | NFNGES |
| NATIVE WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF CANADA | NWAC |
| ROYAL COMMISSION ON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE | RCAP |
| ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE | RCMP |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Social science research is a process of trying to gain a better understanding of the complexities of human interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This study is an attempt to understand the complexities of formally educated First Nations women in the Treaty Six region of Alberta and the dynamics of in-group social acceptance and support when such women return to reserves to do paid work. Formally educated First Nations women are those women who are registered with the federal government with Treaty and Band membership status, and who possess a university or college degree. The Alberta Treaty Six region is located in the central part of the province. Within these regions the treaties signed with the First Nations people and the federal government declared certain land areas would be designated for First Nations people. These are known as Indian reservations. The Treaty Six region consists of sixteen Indian reservations[1]. The dynamics of in-group social acceptance and support involve the exploration of the experiences of these women who return to their communities with their university or college degrees. It is hoped that the completion of this study will provide insight into the changing roles of First Nations women and continue to make the pursuit of formal education acceptable.

This research explored the experiences of First Nations women through in-depth semi-structured interviews and relevant academic literature. I examined the support systems the

---

[1] These Indian reservations are Alexander, Alexis, Beaver Lake, Cold Lake First Nations, Enoch Cree Nation, Ermineskin Tribe, Frog Lake, Heart Lake, Kehewin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Montana, O'chiese, Paul, Saddle Lake, Samson, Sunchild First Nations, and Whitefish Lake (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1999, p.2).

women had while attending a post-secondary institution and the acceptance they experienced by community members upon their return home. Part of my purpose has been to develop grounded theory to lead to further research on the conditions under which women obtain a higher education and are able to obtain professional employment on their reserves.

## 1.8 Background and Statement of the Problem

Current literature on in-group social acceptance and support explores the experiences of non-First Nations women who often are not Canadian. This study examines the experiences of a unique segment of Canadian society. First Nations women are the most disadvantaged population in Canada (Brodribb, 1984; Chiste, 1994; DIAND, 1996a; Fiske, 1990-1991; & Voyageur, 1996). It is well known that a formal education has the potential to increase one's standard of living. Therefore, does a formal education improve the standard of living for First Nations women when they return to the reservation to seek employment? In 1996, Statistics Canada released a pre-publication of demographic data outlining the social and economic conditions of First Nations women (DIAND, 1996a ). This publication revealed that Native women are more likely to seek formal education in the areas of business, finance and administration, and sales and service. It was also revealed that the majority of these women lived in poverty and substandard living conditions prior to seeking their higher education. In my experience, as a First Nations woman, I have suspected that not only do Native women seek a higher education to earn a good salary and improve their own standard of living, but also to address the poverty that surrounds them. Thus, this research was also designed to see if women seek a formal education to change the living conditions of the communities in which

they live.

First Nations women must leave their reserves to obtain a formal education. This entails leaving the security of their extended families and cultural belief systems. Inevitably this changes them. Do their values change, and how does this affect their acceptance upon their return to their communities? To what extent does obtaining a higher education far away from home change them? Will their higher education assist their opportunities for employment on their reserves? Thus, it is essential to examine cultural group[2] dynamics and the role of formal education as a social change agent for First Nations women.

Given the potential for formal education to serve as a social change agent for First Nation's women and their reserves, my initial focus was on the potential for these women to become integrated back into the reserves to promote social change. My initial notions were that women in the community would be first and foremost connected by ethnicity and gender. Yet my research suggests that when the women returned to the reserves the creation of two types of women was created; a group of women who have a formal education[3] and a group of women who do not. The difficulties the women faced in this study are consistent with current studies on in-group conflict that suggest that members of the in-group who have not "changed" feel

---

2 A group is a social unit which consists of a number of individuals who, at a given time, stand in more or less definite interdependent status and role relationships with one another, and which explicitly or implicitly possess a set of norms or values regulating the behaviour of the individual members, at least in matters of consequence to the group (Sherif M., 1961, p.198).

3 A formal education is perceived by some Cree people to mean assimilation, therefore one is no longer considered to be an Indian if she has adopted wholeheartedly "white" education.

threatened by the uncertainty associated with "changed" members (Dovidio, Gaertner, Isen, Rust, & Guerra, 1998; Gaertner, Dovidio, Bachman & Anastasio, 1996; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1991; & Wilder & Shapiro, 1991). Gaertner, Mann, Murrell & Dovidio (1989) and Worchel (1986) believe intergroup conflict is inevitable because of simple variation in personal characteristics. One might expect greater intergroup conflict when ingroup members observe changes in those who have received a higher education, especially in terms of personal ambition, being more outspoken, comfort with challenging State authorities, and loss of "sense of humor". My research also addresses how higher educated Native women view the possibilities to diffuse in-group conflict between those who have a higher education and those who do not. Sherif & Sherif have recognized the capacity of intergroup cooperation to facilitate the development of a common superordinate goal, but this was conceived to be a long-term rather than an initial consequence of this activity (1969, pp.268-269). The women in this study will most likely be from disadvantaged backgrounds with a shared desire to change the socio-economic conditions of reserve life.

## 1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

(1) understand formally educated Native women's perception of their personal characteristics and sources of support that assisted them in their pursuit of a higher education; and

(2) describe the "superordinate goals", specifically in relation to community development, that Native formally educated women had identified for their reserves; and,

(3) describe formally educated Native women's experiences when returning to their reserves,

in terms of employment, respect for their knowledge, and ingroup dynamics that serve as impediments or support to their acceptance on the reserve.

By critically analyzing the experiences of formally educated First Nations women and identifying patterns in their experiences, I was able to develop a grounded theory that addresses the initial impetus for women to obtain a higher education, as related to the personal characteristics important for successfully completing a degree, as related to the area in which they seek their degrees, as related to the contribution the women seek to make to reserve communities, and finally as related to the experience they have as formally educated women on the reserve, where some women leave the reserve, and others are able to stay.

## 1.3 Guiding Theory

As an indigenous researcher, I am particularly sensitive to the social and political meaning of higher education beyond allowing individuals obtain professional and higher paying jobs. It is important to understand the living conditions of Native people to understand both the strong reasons and challenges for women who grow up on reserves, to successfully pursue a higher education, and then return to those reserves (despite various other employment options in non-reserve regions) when their new status on the reserve is uncertain. Thus, one cannot do a study such as this without recognizing the history of Aboriginal people, and more specifically Aboriginal women (see Hungry Wolf, 1996b & Pierre-Aggamaway, 1989) in Canada. By recognizing the role of Aboriginal women during pre-contact times, colonization, and the changing status of women in more recent times (the last 50 years) ("Gender equality," 2000;

Freeman, 1998; & Jaimes, Halsey, & Ozer 1990), one can more clearly appreciate the context in which so few women have been able to obtain post-secondary education. While the majority of text in the literature review is about this historical context, I discuss some documentation of Native perceptions about "western education" and its relevance to Native culture and identity ( Hassin & Young, 1999; Huffman, 1991; Kirkness & Barnhart, 1991; Tate & Schwartz, 1993), and other studies that address education as a tool for social change (Freire, 1970). Additionally, this study draws upon a number of studies on Native women in Canada that have addressed support systems (Brayboy & Morgan, 1998; Friesen & Orr, 1998; Garrett, 1996; & Lepage-Lees, 1998), leadership roles (Boldt, 1980; Crowfoot, 1997; & Hassin & Young, 1999; & Jules, 1988), roles in community development (Gunn-Allen, 1986; Herring & Welsh, 1991; Miller 1994a & Poitras, 1986), and trends in higher education (Dion-Stout & Kipling, 1996; Haig-Brown, 1998; & Medicine, 1988). Additionally, I drew some guidance from more general theory on in-group acceptance and support (Dovidio et al., 1998; Grant & Brown, 1995; Smith, Murphy & Coats, 1999; & Wilder & Shapiro, 1991).

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study attempted to fill the existing gap in academic literature on the experiences of Aboriginal women who have obtained a higher education in Canada. This research is focused on a unique segment of Canadian society which compromises approximately 1.04% of the total Canadian population, comprising approximately 170,361 First Nations women. While that may seem like small minority, this population is expected to double in the next five years (DIAND, 1996a). The significance of this study is even more striking when one recognizes

the substandard socio-economic conditions on First Nations reserves compared to the rest of Canada (Canada, 1996a; Deprez, 1976; & Voyageur, 1996). This research is also unique because it examines social change from the perspective of First Nations people and not that of mainstream Canadian society. This research recognizes that a formal education in a foreign culture is necessary for the survival of Cree culture. A formal education has the potential to provide First Nations women with improved employment and influence, thus increasing their income and standard of living. As a collective force, higher educated Aboriginal women may be increasingly recognized as key social change agents able to address the underlying causes and social conditions that perpetuate poverty on reserves, and to serve as role models for future generations. This research has the potential to inform policy makers about the most appropriate programs to better serve Aboriginal women who seek a higher education, and who have desires to return to the reserves to put their formally acquired knowledge to use.

## 1.5 Research Design

Qualitative research methods, specifically in-depth interviews, have been used to collect data for this study. I interviewed eleven women through snowball sampling, using my current contacts in the field. A discussion of personal issues calls for a time-intensive approach with the respondents, thus a long-interview data collection process (McCracken, 1988; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This research required reflection of the respondents on their past and current experiences, and their ways of coping with perceived obstacles to personal goals. The interviews allowed the respondents to explain how they have been received by their communities and how they perceive their formal education has affected their acceptance and

support in their communities. The long interview allowed the respondents to use, clarify or add additional information that the researcher did not know while constructing the questionnaire. The open-ended questions allowed the respondents the opportunity to share in great detail various life experiences. The respondents were able to relay their understanding of the phenomenon or situation more easily in interviews, describe the context under which they made decisions, and emphasize what issues are of greatest importance to them. I conducted and transcribed all of the interviews, resulting in approximately 118 pages, to maintain close familiarity with the data.

The focus of this research is on the rich content of the long interview, rather than the generalities that can be made across a large sample. I used grounded theory building approach to develop theory as I analyzed the data. Grounded theory methodology provides that data analysis occurs concurrently with data collection, and the specific focus emerges as the analysis proceeds (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Strauss et al state, "the grounded theory approach is the qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon," (1990, p. 24). As the interviews were being conducted, concepts and categories were identified and used to develop a theoretical framework. The fieldnotes and memos were also incorporated throughout the data analysis. These concepts and categories were coded using NUD*IST 4 Classic, qualitative data analysis software. Academic literatures were also analyzed to assist with the development of theory, as already noted above.

## 1.6 Strengths and Limitations

I carried this study out with the advantage of my insider status with Cree women. I am Cree and familiar with life on the reserve. My heritage and upbringing have provided me with an enriched understanding of the socio-economic and socio-political conditions that affect formally educated First Nations Cree women. My role as a researcher was most likely accepted more readily by the women I interviewed than would be by a white female researcher, as they could identify with me, they were comfortable with me, and confident that I would accurately represent their views.

The study is limited to the experiences of formally educated women, thereby neglecting less educated women. The sample size is small, but the quality of the information is abundant. In fact, it is the quality and richness of the data that has been difficult to condense in a Master thesis. Thus, given the connection of the issues in my thesis to so many socio-political issues, ultimately my thesis can tell a wider audience only a small part of the story about formally educated Aboriginal women. My familiarity with Aboriginal issues and challenges on reserves has allowed me to understand some of the more sensitive complexities (e.g., spiritual issues) associated with the reported experiences of my respondents. At times, I was challenged by presenting these findings from a Native perspective to a non-Native audience. For example, it only possible to scratch the surface of depth required to explain Cree values and beliefs, yet some of these values and beliefs are important in order to *also* understand this study's findings. I believe that the many long discussions Dr. Krogman and I shared enhanced my ability to be an insider and outsider at the same time.

## 1.7 Dissemination of the Results

The identification of social policy issues will be beneficial to the Treaty six Indian reserves, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), and all First Nation women. In addition institutes of formal education can begin to address this issue with their First Nation students and interested parties. Publishing in journals whose primary focus is gender, ethnicity, and/or education would allow this study to be shared with a wider and varied audience, who may be able to assist with the plight of Aboriginal women. Organizations in Canada who would benefit from this study include Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Assembly of First Nations (AFN), First Nations Accountability Coalition (FNAC), and the newly created National First Nations Gender Equality Secretariat (NFNGES). These organizations could benefit since this study is based on the exploration of Aboriginal women's experiences and the potential for solutions that would benefit all Aboriginal women in their pursuits to create healthier communities, learning environments, safe homes and growth in pride.

Each respondent will receive a summary of this study to allow each participant to critically assess their situations. It is hoped that this will allow them to find solutions for their dilemmas, and to be in a better position to mentor other Aboriginal women who seek a higher education or who try to gain employment on their reserves.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on First Nations women in leadership roles is very limited and virtually non-existent for women in the Treaty Six region[4]. Various scholarly studies exist on various Aboriginal women throughout North America. Studies designed to examine the lifestyle of Cree women who reside in the Treaty Six region are rare and not of a scholarly nature. Early writings focussed on erroneous interpretations of First Nation women's mental health and birthing patterns (Medicine, 1988a&b). Recent writings include literary creations and politically motivated pieces that document Aboriginal women's lives (Freeman, 1998; Hoikkala, 1998; & Jaimes & Halsey, 1992). The change in literature has been the inclusion of Aboriginal women authors, greatly enhancing the credibility of the literature. However, current academic literature is limited and fails to adequately address the diversity of Aboriginal women. The literature that exists tends to group all North American Aboriginal groups into one category and examine them without consideration of their cultural differences.

To understand Native women in Canada, it is important to start with some historical background. I first examine the history of Aboriginal women prior to contact with Europeans, then their initial contact with Europeans, and the effects of the imposed European governing system on them. The various government-created categories of Aboriginal women will be examined, followed by a section on relationships between leadership and gender in Native communities. The socio-economic conditions of First Nations reservations will be examined in an attempt to describe the context

---

[4] Treaty six was signed at Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt in 1876, it covers central Alberta and Saskatchewan. There are sixteen Alberta First Nations (DIAND, 1999)

in which women desire to attend and successfully complete their programs at a University or College. The field of education sought and how it assists their community is also examined.

I also summarize research that has addressed Aboriginal women who have sought a formal education, and the existing literature on their support systems, and level of acceptance from their communities. The database for this review was collected from academic journal articles, book chapters, newspaper articles, government publications and video recordings. The literature examined various Aboriginal groups in Canada and the United States of America.

## 2.1 History of Aboriginal Women

Historically the roles of Aboriginal women included the raising of children, maintaining the home, and preparing meals. In addition, women were responsible for the land based on a shared belief that the earth is their mother, and mothers are the providers and nurturers of life (Brodribb, 1984; Faith, Gottfriedson, Joe, Leonard & McIvor, 1990; Gunn-Allen, 1986; Hungry Wolf, 1996b; & Niezen, 1993). In addition women had equal say when decisions were required (Brant, 1990; Hedican, 1991; Lui & Temara, 1998; & Niezen, 1993). The arrival of the Europeans brought a foreign decision-making process based on patriarchy. Eventually men were recognized as the appropriate gender to be elected as leaders in their communities; "leadership roles within the community have become more formalized through dealings with European and Canadian officials, and these positions have been held exclusively by men" (Bonvillain, 1989, p.7). In addition Brodribb (1984) writes that ethnocentric European males changed the gender relationship between First Nation people for their benefit; that is, the

women became submissive, and the balanced decision-making process was destroyed. This resulted in Aboriginal women having their influence in pertinent community decision-making ignored, thus their value as equal partners in politics was diminished (Medicine, 1983; Nicholas-MacKenzie, 2000; & Wise Harris, 1991-1992). This created two problems: one, women were no longer respected for their knowledge and wisdom; and two, the leadership was no longer based on cooperation and complementary roles. This new type of governance based on patriarchy and competition was foreign to many Aboriginal communities because it was based on conflict and competition (Hedican, 1991; Lee, 1992; & Long & Boldt, 1987). The hierarchy of European leadership was difficult for Aboriginal people to comprehend because "they had difficulty in understanding how someone was able to retain their much valued self-esteem, while at the same time accepting without question the orders of others" (Hedican, 1991, p.4), making the European leadership style difficult to adopt.

Aboriginal cultural norms and values with regards to leadership are very different from mainstream society. Several researchers including Brant (1990), Hedican (1991), Lui, (1998) & Niezen (1993) have all indicated that Aboriginal leadership was based on equality and that having one person as a leader was a very foreign concept when it was introduced to Aboriginal people. In addition Jaimes & Halsey (1992) and Gunn-Allen (1986) noted that the existence of two types of leadership existed, one which was the domain of the women and concerned decision-making regarding the home and community and a second type of leadership which was the domain of the men. The men were responsible for the external affairs of the community which included communicating with foreign communities, but their consultation was informed by the views and concerns of Native women. Non-native people erroneously

assumed that the men were the leaders of the community.

Decisions regarding the well-being of the community were based on a complementary relationship of cooperation and consultation (Brant Castellano, 1989; & Caffrey, 2000). In addition, Brant (1990) summarized leadership values of aboriginal people regarding non-competitiveness and persuasion:

> The practice of non-competitiveness meanwhile suppresses conflict by averting intragroup rivalry and preventing any embarrassment that a less able member of the group might feel in an interpersonal situation (p.535); and
>
> The white man who can out-advise another is 'one up' and the individual over whom has exerted influence is expected to take it with good grace. In Native society by contrast, such an attempt to exert by advising, instructing, coercing or persuading is always considered bad form or bad behavior (p.535).

Traditional relations between men and women were based on complementary roles and equality. This relationship suffered with colonialism and the colonialist's preference for male dominance. This was evident in the negotiations between First Nations' male dominated political organizations and First Nations' female-dominated political organizations prior to the federal government's legislation of Bill C-31 (Hall, 1993; & Littlechild, 2000, discussion of Bill C-31 to follow).

The concept of women having political input into decision-making was a foreign concept for Europeans, who refused to accept women as capable political leaders and worthy advisories (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992). Gunn-Allen (1986) noted four objectives required for social change that were utilized by both the United States and Canadian governments:

> Effecting the social transformation from egalitarian, gynecentric[5] systems to hierarchical, patriarchal systems requires meeting four objectives. The first is accomplished when the primacy of female as creator is displaced and replaced by male-centered creators.... The second objective is achieved when tribal governing institutions and the philosophies that are their foundation are destroyed, ... The third objective is accomplished when the people are pushed off their lands, deprived of their economic livelihood, and forced to curtail or end altogether pursuits on which their ritual system, philosophy, and subsistence depends. ... The fourth objective requires that the clan structure be replaced, in fact if not in theory, by the nuclear family (p. 41 - 42).

These initiatives of both governments were effective in the destruction of self-sufficient aboriginal communities.

The European governing system resulted in the role of women in leadership being ignored and unrecognized. The patrilineal system of the Europeans brought disastrous results for women, " The Christian ethic of patriarchy - a male god and patrilineal kinship model with the impositions of patrilineal family names- virtually eclipsed the autonomy of native women" (Medicine, 1993, p.123). The state created an elected system of governance based on a patriarchal model to be utilized by First Nations bands. Although the people elected their representatives, the state could veto band decisions. The resulting leadership placed value on men, who competed for band councillor positions and the position of chief, creating an environment for family structural breakdown because women's contributions were being overlooked (Caffrey, 2000; Elias, 1991; Langford, 1994; & Voyageur, 1996). Similarly, missionaries worshiped a male figure and promoted the subjugation of women to their husbands:

---

5 Gynecentric - a word used by the author to represent 'women centred' from the words gynaecology: science of the female reproductive system and centric: at or near the centre (Oxford Dictionary).

> To accomplish this task [conversion to a patriarchal system], the good fathers had to loosen the hold of Montagnais women on tribal policies and to convince both men and women that a woman's proper place was under the authority of her husband and that a man's proper place was under the authority of the priests (Gunn-Allen, 1986, p. 38).

These attempts to silence women and destroy their complementary role in the community have been successful.

In 1990, Karlene Faith, a professor at School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University did a roundtable interview with four Aboriginal women in Kamloops, British Columbia. One statement of particular importance that reveals a traditional perspective on leadership is as follows:

> *Sharon*: The person who was named Chief of the band would be a chief for a certain purpose. So you may have a War Chief, . . . but basically it wouldn't be a "Chief," he would be a leader, a spokesperson.
>
> *Cherry*: Most of the decisions made for a community came from the elders . . .
>
> *Sharon*: The elders had say, the other people had say and, unlike the non-Native society, the women had say. And in many issues, like land issues. The women are the ones responsible for the land, and what they decided was what was acted on . . .
>
> Whoever went out to do the negotiating, or whoever went out to danger, was the most dispensable person. It would be foolish to send out whoever was very important. So basically they were spokespeople (p.175).

These statements show that the patriarchal and hierarchal system of the Europeans was a very foreign concept which resulted in different values being placed on leaders. This led to the development of a new type of leader, one who was comfortable with competition, control and individualism. In addition, the traditional selection of leadership was replaced with elected leaders.

Each leader who holds the position of chief or councilor must be elected to that position, however, the federal department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) oversees the process and must approve all elections and future decisions made by the chief and council. The federal government with the signing of Treaty Six, in 1866, virtually controlled all aspects of Aboriginal life (Hedican, 1991; & Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 1991). Elias (1991) sums it up with the following statement:

> By the early 1960s government control was so deeply entrenched there was policy on almost every aspect of Aboriginal people's lives, interests, and concerns. Policy was rooted in the belief that Canadian institutions alone could prescribe solutions to Aboriginal people's problems (p. 1).

State policy has served to divide Aboriginal communities through the differential legal treatment of Indian people based on gender. Gender preference was given to men allowing them to control vital political, economic and social venues. The Indian Act of 1876 contained a gender based discriminatory section[6] which stated that women lost their treaty and band status if they married a non-status man. If a treaty status woman married a man with treaty status from a different reserve, her band membership would be automatically transferred to the other band. However, if a treaty man married a non-status woman she would gain treaty and band status (Faith et al., 1990; Felkins, 1998; Fiske, 1995; Medicine, 1993; & Miller, 1996). Due to the efforts of various Native women's political organizations, including the NWAC[7], the 1985 the Indian Act was amended with Bill C-31:

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6 This was known as the Enfranchisement Act of 1869 which was Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act.

7 The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is founded on a collective goal to enhance, promote and foster the social, economic, cultural and political well-being of First Nations and Metis women within Aboriginal and Canadian societies (Native Women's Association of Canada, 1989).

> An act to amend the Indian Act redefined who is and who is not a registered Indian. The sexually discriminatory passages of the Old Indian Act were rescinded. Now marriage no longer affects legal status. Women who lost status upon marriage became eligible for reinstatement to band membership and for re-registration and were granted contingent band membership, the latter to be ratified by the bands themselves (Fiske, 1990-91, p.6).

Women who lost their Indian status could now reapply for their treaty rights. Once she received her treaty rights she had to apply for band membership rights. Band membership is determined, in many cases, by the band chief and council. Band membership rights would allow one to vote for chief and council and apply for housing on or off the reserve. Many women had to fight for their band membership rights and were not welcomed-back to their reserves by the leaders. This resulted in:

> growing numbers of complaints from women about violations of human rights . . . In January 1990, the Ontario Native Women's Association reported increasing violence against women, in particular to reinstated women who had sought access to band resources, (Fiske, 1990-1991, p. 18).

Women were being discriminated against by their own people, in many cases, their own families due to a lack of, and competition over, scarce resources. Although these women had their treaty status back, Bill C-31 remains controversial for First Nations people because it contains a clause that phases out the offspring of 'Bill C-31' people after the fourth generation.

First Nations male leaders have played a role in silencing First Nations women in several ways. Brown, Jamieson & Kovach (1995) found the women who have made political statements contrary to the male agenda (e.g., the Charlottetown Accord, Bill C-31) have been labeled as divisive to the First Nations cause, and were perceived as betraying their people. McCoy

(1992) found that tribal men members tended to have a negative attitude toward Aboriginal women leaders and were unsupportive of their endeavors. Brown et al. (1995) suggested males have effectively silenced women through monopolizing the political leadership. The monopoly of men often prevents women from becoming involved in politics. The male members of the community may ostracize women for taking on leadership roles:

> Council women have described the hostility and belittlement they face when dealing with men from all or largely male tribal councils, and council men have described their discomfort in working with women (Miller,1994a, p.68).

The discrimination women faced from their families and male dominated leadership prompted some aboriginal women to become politically active. These women have stated that a political agenda was necessitated by the lack of concern for their welfare and their traditional roles as care-takers of the community, and lack of concern for women's and children's issues (Green, 1980; Haig-Brown, 1998; & LaFromboise, Heyle, & Ozer, 1990; & Wagamese, 2000). This has resulted in the creation of the National First Nations Gender Equality Secretariat (NFNGES). The NFNGES was established by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) in 1999. The National Chief Phil Fontaine explained the purpose of the NFNGES as "a positive step toward inclusiveness [of women] within all AFN activities. Establishing the Secretariat demonstrated the AFN's commitment to develop effective internal policies that represent the views and interests of First Nations women" (FNM, 2000, p.7). First Nations women's issues are also being acknowledged by the media as reflected in an article by Wagamese (2000) who acknowledges that "First Nations Women's issues deserve and demand the full attention of our leadership". A point that he makes which summarizes this section is as follows:

> Obviously, if life begins within the woman's body and the first flickering of spirit is ignited by the warmth of hers, then our future, as individuals, communities and nations stems directly from protecting, securing and nurturing the rights of our women (p.5).

Other government methods that have contributed to community breakdown included the division of community members based on blood quantum. Blood quantum determined what type of Aboriginal you were: Metis or First Nations. (Aboriginal people from the northern part of Canada were labeled Inuit.) Members within these groups have treaty status, and/ or band status, or neither. This has resulted in increased levels of conflict between these groups as they attempt to access limited resources. One's identity can be destroyed in this process because the identity is judged on the basis of legalities and not heritage. Some argue that the state has gone to great lengths to ensure that Aboriginal people are without a single identity (Chiste, 1994).

The state approach to assist First Nations people has been to assimilate them, as evidenced in the Indian Act's gender-based discriminatory clauses. Other attempts included *The Hawthorne Report - A Survey of the Contemporary Indians of Canada: Economic, Political, Educational Needs and Policies*[8], and *The White Paper - Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy 1969*[9]. These studies were conducted by non-Aboriginal people, without input from First Nations people, determined that economic assimilation was the answer to First Nations

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8 This report assembled a stunning indictment of the life conditions of Indian peoples in all parts of Canada - low incomes, low life-expectancy, low levels of education, high incidence of preventable disease, high levels of incarcerations, weak civic institutions, inadequate housing, high consumption of transfers, and negligible access to capital funds. The federal government's response was to shift it's responsibilities to the provinces (Elias, 1991, p. 4).

9 The report included a "proposal to dissolve reserves and transfer responsibilities for Indians to the provinces ... The federal government insisted culture would survive only is it could successfully compete in the established economic and political arena of ethnic relations. If it didn't survive, a particular cultural form was, by definition, inadequate," (Elias, 1991, p. 9).

issues (Elias, 1991). The issue of culture and heritage were not considered when the reports were finalized. The recommendations of the reports were not enforced because of the opposition presented by Aboriginal people and their supporters. The Manitoba Indian Brotherhood's 1971 response to the *White Paper*, entitled *Wahbung: Our Tomorrows*, was a landmark document in the evolution of an indigenous approach to development:

> In developing new methods of response and community involvement it is imperative that we, both Indian and Government, recognize that economic, social and educational development are synonymous, and thus must be dealt with as a "total" approach rather than in parts (Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, 1971, p. xviii-xix).

Aboriginal people continue to stand up for their rights and make the State accountable for its actions. In 1990, the head of AFN and the federal members of parliaments in the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs[10] were in the process of changing the current relationship between the state and First Nations:

> The Standing Committee had explicitly stressed the need for the government to put into place a conflict resolution mechanism to reduce the "highly visible policy disputes" that characterize the relationship between the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) and First Nations peoples (Weaver, 1990, p.9).

Weaver (1990) describes a number of paradigms about the relationships between Aboriginal people and the federal government, that ensured cultural survival. These included the growing

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10 Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, House of Commons, "has to have regard to the political composition of the House and my receive representations from individual members who wish to serve on the committee, from the Whips of the various parties, and the Department concerned (House of Commons FS L6, 2000, p.3)

and ongoing relationship of adaptation which is contrary to the original concept of assimilation. Also, the existence of varying levels of relationships between the state and First Nations people which included the recognition of sanctioned rights. Aboriginal people need to be able to develop policy without state interference but with acceptance and assistance (de Mello, 1992 & Niezen, 1993). The 1996 Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal People[11] (RCAP) listed 440 recommendations to improve the relationship between the state and aboriginal people. The government responded in 1997, with the *Gathering of Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*:

> is an action plan designed to renew the relationship with the Aboriginal people of Canada. This plan builds on the principles of mutual respect, mutual recognition, mutual responsibility and sharing which were identified in the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (p.2, DIAND, 1997).

First Nations leaders are advocating 'self-government'. In some cases some leaders have used "the politics of embarrassment" as a method to obtain a self-government. George Erasmus, former chairman of the AFN and advisor for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP), expressed a general strategy for achieving native self-government. He stated that Aboriginal people must, "Go outside of this country. We must embarrass this country. We have to tell the world about our situation here in Canada" (Erasmus, 1988, p.53).

The declaration for a self-government would allow First Nations to oversee their policies and regulations for their communities. This culturally appropriate development process would include the incorporation of identity and traditional values, culturally appropriate community-

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[11] A generously funded national panel conducting a broad inquiry into the economic, social, and political issues affecting the lives of Aboriginal peoples (Chiste, 1994, p.41).

based organizations, a land base, independence from the state, and a well-established link between local and national communities (Lee, 1992). Initial stages of development begin with cultural identity, but it remains unclear if self government will address the issues pertinent to women and women's roles in state negotiations. Being that the majority of political leaders are men (Archibald, 1994; Chiste, 1994; Fiske, 1990-1991; Hedican, 1991; Miller, 1996; & Voyageur, 1996), it is possible that women's issues would be neglected:

> Social science theory suggests that women's socialization, roles and life experiences are different from those of men; therefore, it is likely that there are significant differences in policy interests, political goals and perceptions as a result of gender (McCoy, 1992, p. 58).

From the perspective of the First Nation Accountability Coalition (FNAC) of Manitoba, an organization that represents the views of Aboriginal women from across Canada, " First Nations are woefully unprepared to take their affairs into their own hands" (Aboriginal - Accountability, 1999). Other current news reports also indicate First Nation voices showing concern about corruption as a problem that should be addressed prior to establishing self-government (McClean 2000; Associated Press 1997). FNAC discusses mismanagement of band funds and campaigns of terror against those who oppose the leaders. FNAC asserted that many intra-band issues would not be addressed under self-government, indicating that First Nations people are not ready for self-government:

> Federal responses to demands for self-determination resulted in greater decentralization of administrative control and increased fiscal responsibility of tribal councils and their umbrella organizations, and women's associations were denied direct funding, with the expectation that they would receive assistance from male-dominated political organizations (Fiske, 1995, p.20).

When Phil Fontaine, the National Chief of the AFN, was approached by reporters to express

his views on these accusations his response was, "corruption on reserves should be reported to the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police)," and Fontaine disputed FNAC's assertion that Aboriginal peoples were not ready for self-government (Aboriginal Accountability,1999, p.2).

The NWAC shares the same sentiments as the FNAC that women's issues would not be addressed should First Nations be allowed to govern their affairs.

> The ultimate irony was that women found themselves assimilating in order to resist state policies of assimilation; that is, they felt impelled to turn to the tools and rules of the state in order to secure their Indian status and its benefits (Fiske, 1995, p. 19).

The development of the NFNGES provided a venue for First Nations women to have their concerns addressed in consultation with the AFN. Women have important roles in community development yet their roles as leaders are often overlooked by the band members. The research on Aboriginal women's leadership is very limited. Some of the existing literature explores political injustices that have served as obstacles to Aboriginal women in obtaining leadership positions (Brodribb, 1984; Chiste, 1994; Fiske, 1990-1991; Gerber, 1990; Morriseau, October 27, 1996; McCoy, 1992; Miller, 1996; Lee, 1992; Saskatchewan Indian, 1998; Voyageur, 1996; &Weaver, 1990). These studies also indicate that Aboriginal women are more likely to become political leaders in their communities than are non-Aboriginal women in their respective communities. Aboriginal women are more likely to become involved in politics to improve their community by ensuring the needs of the children and elderly are being addressed (Langford, 1994 & Canadian Women's Studies, 1989). McCoy (1992) found that after interviewing 19 women tribal leaders from across the United States, women leaders viewed politics as a public service and obligation of citizenship. A key issue for Aboriginal women

leadership is tribal economic development with a focus on health, education and shelter. Through economic development the resources required for self-sufficiency are obtained and healthy social change begins (Romaniuc, 2000; & LaFromboise et al, 1990).

Women are the least likely to access the limited resources provided by the state (Dion-Stout & Kipling, 1998 & Voyageur, 1996). The standard of living for Native women and their children is below the poverty level (DIAND, 1996a & Fleras, 1996). DIAND's 1996 report on Aboriginal women indicate that these women are more likely to be employed in the blue collar service sector, with seven or more children and have adults dependent on them for economic support. Based on the revised *1998 Indian Act*, there are three types of Treaty status women: those with full band membership rights who live off the reserve; those with full band membership rights who live on the reserve; and those without full band membership rights who live off the reserve. These categories create conflict between these groups of women and the band's leadership. There are a number of differences in rights assigned to Status Indian women. Status women with full band membership rights, and who live on the reserve, are entitled to housing, band administrated social assistance programs, health care, educational funding, and the right to vote for the band chief and council. Status women with full band membership rights living off the reserve can vote for chief and council, access health care, educational funding, and are eligible for additional band income such as oil royalties. Status women without full band membership rights living off the reserve cannot live on the reserve, can vote for chief and council, but are not entitled to housing and additional band income. They are eligible for health care and educational funding.

These are all status Indians, yet where First Nations women live and whether or not they have

band membership strongly affects their access to limited resources (Elias, 1991; Hedican, 1991; & Lee, 1992). For the purposes of this study registered treaty status women with or without band membership, employed on reservations or in the Treaty Six region, will be referred to as First Nations women.

## 2.2 First Nations Communities

It is well documented that First Nations people have different values, ideologies, and beliefs from general society which form the foundation for their communities. This foundation provided the framework that allowed Aboriginal people to survive for centuries (Brant, 1990; de Mello, 1992; Hedican, 1991; & Elias, 1991). Gerber (1979) defined an institutionally complete community as:

> An institutionally complete band is capable of meeting more of the social, economic, and political needs of its members from within its own boundaries. Because its "problem solving and decision-making processes and structures" are established, a framework exists for leadership and community action (p.405- 406).

Gerber (1979) did a comparative analysis and found that various bands throughout Canada are in various stages of community development or are integrating into general society. She found that it is erroneous to assume all Indian bands are living in poverty and devoid of opportunities. She based her study on data gathered in 1969. In the 30 years since her findings, some bands are economically independent, while the majority continue to remain dependent on government funding:

> For status Indians on reserve, denial of access to virtually all but the minimal means of production, with heavily restricted possibilities for acquiring capital, meant the vast majority of Aboriginal people were cut off from many sources of income and wealth provided by capitalist economic growth (Warburton, 1997, p.126).

First Nations women are more likely to live in poverty on the reserve or in urban areas (DIAND, 1996a). Integration with mainstream society has occurred very slowly and has followed a path of adaptation. First Nations have elected instead to become culturally independent and adapt to the changes in and around their communities (Boldt, 1981; Elias, 1991; Fiske, 1995; & Hedican, 1991).

Poverty is a creation of the capitalist system and state imposed restrictions on First Nations people (Kirmayer et al, 2000; Pierre-Aggamaway, 1989; & Satzewich, 1991). Warburton refers to the concept of capitalism which is the basis for colonization. Therefore, one must examine the role of colonization and it's impact on present day Aboriginal people and poverty. The restricted access to economic wealth created a value system contrary to traditional values. The state limited access to these resources created a state-dependent nation and disrupted Aboriginal identity and self-worth. Rahnema (1992) stated that "most traditional societies had resisted the view that all poverty reflected personal inadequacy. This view ... was now advanced as a major component of the new value system. ... Economic poverty was now to be perceived and acted upon, on a global level, as a shame and a scourge" (p.163). The economic poverty evident on virtually all First Nations reserves reflects this shame system. It is difficult for First Nations people to find pride in themselves in a system where they are set up to fail. Personal failures lead to societal failures:

> One of the alarming aspects of the loss of a culture is that, in the absence of processes which meet people's needs, social disintegration takes place. That is why acculturation can be associated with alcoholism, suicide, family dis-integration and all the other social ills for which the federal government has programs. This is a model of colonialism: first, one creates the problem through the destruction of native economy and then one offers welfare programs as a remedy (Pierre-Aggamaway, 1989).

Fiske (1990-91), Satzewich (1991), Warburton (1997), and numerous other researchers have overwhelmingly noted the state created an economically dependent state of First Nations people which resulted in a number of social ills. In Fiske's (1990-91) study about the Carrier Indian reserve in central British Columbia, she noted that in addition to poverty, First Nations communities differ from general society as follows:

> Native Indian communities differ from other Canadian communities in three important regards: first, their community government, usually an elected council, has minimal powers of administration and in all respects is subject to rulings of the federal government; second, community life is associated closely with residence on Indian reserves; and third, because the land base of the reserves is either inadequate or impoverished, the majority of native communities suffer chronic unemployment, poverty, and dependency on state-controlled welfare (p.122).

In addition, Hungry Wolf (1996b) wrote:

> It seemed that the government wanted to make Native people dependent upon them. We ended up with institutionalized poverty. Limited financial opportunities on the Reserve forced those who stayed to struggle for money to support their families (p. 79).

Hedican (1991), Jaimes & Halsey (1992), & Lee (1992) have found similar results in their

research. A number of First Nations reserves exist in poverty conditions which directly impact the roles of women. In this respect, First Nations communities differ from mainstream society. Historically, First Nations people believed women were responsible for their homes and families which sets the foundation for shared community beliefs, values, and mores. One of these values and beliefs included the concept of extended families, because everyone is related. In the extended family it has been the responsibility of the women to raise families and pass on the culture, as it has been done for centuries (Gunn-Allen, 1986; & Hungry Wolf, 1996a; & Medicine, 1983). Also, Poitras (1986) noted:

> Traditionally, women had respect, dignity, power, and influence. They were integral, exalted members of their communities. A great percentage of traditional tribes were matriarchal societies. Women were responsible for their families and it was also their responsibility to care for their communities (p. 12).

Lack of resources makes it difficult to accomplish this task. There are some communities who are returning to traditional values and incorporating them into various institutions including education, administration and healthcare. Traditionally education and healthcare are considered to be the responsibility of women, as well as a safe learning environment (Haig-Brown, 1998; & Katz & St. Denis,1991). Education can lead to an improved standard of living through academic writing, political involvement and the accompanying understanding of the legal system, and to regain the respect women once held. Kirkness & Barnhardt (1991) summarized the reasons for obtaining a university education as:

> a desire for "respect," "relevance," "reciprocity," and "responsibility," and as such, reflect a larger purpose than simply obtaining a university degree to get a better job. First Nations students are seeking an education that will also address their communal need for "capacity-building" to advance themselves as a distinct and self-determining society, not just as

individuals (p. 5).

It is ironic that the European education system was designed to assimilate First Nations people but instead is becoming a source of salvation.

Through education and political involvement women are beginning to change the social conditions on and off reserves. The leadership roles they are acquiring reflect their traditional roles as givers of life, educators, and the nurturers of their people. In a similar context, Miller (1996) found "important associations between the qualitites admired in women, women's role in family life and qualities admired in political leaders. This linkage reinforces women's political chances,"(p.34). In addition, Chiste (1994) found that the 1996 RCAP revealed that women wanted a return to traditional ways and to regain the respect they once had in their communities because women were never considered inferior until the Europeans arrived.

As leaders, women are concerned with achieving a balance between social, political, and economic issues. First Nations men are more concerned with politics as evidenced in their pursuit for a self-government. These are the words of Bobbi Smith , a member of the Yukon Women's Association:

> Chiefs continue to see land claims and Indian Self-government as the critical issues to deal with. Women don't argue that they need to be dealt with. Indian women argue that there needs to be a balance between social, economic and cultural issues and that there isn't a balance right now. Those issues are constantly being put on the back burner. We are used to struggling that way - we are used to seeing results of our work taking ten years. Sometimes I get angry about it but other times I think that it is meant to be. It helps us become better at getting what we want (Langford, 1994, p.34).

## 2.3 First Nations Women

Who are the First Nations women and what makes their lifestyle unique? The literature indicates that this is a segment of society that is almost invisible (Grant, 1994 ). In 1996, Voyageur wrote that:

> According to the Department of Indian Affairs demographic profile, Indian women rank among the most severely disadvantaged groups in Canadian society. They are worse off economically than both non-Indians and Indian men (p.93).

Voyageur obtained this information from an Indian and Northern Affairs Canada publication dated 1979 which makes this data 20 years old, but the information it provides is still valid. In 1996, Statistics Canada released a pre-publication of demographic data for First Nations women living on reserves. The data was compiled into a profile based on socio-economic indicators. The profile suggests deplorable socio-economic living conditions for First Nations women. It focused on Registered/Status[12] Indian women who live on-reserve. According to the data from the profile, Registered Status Indian (First Nation) women make up 1.04% of the total Canadian population. Registered Status Indian (First Nation) women make up approximately 51% of the band population on reserves across Canada. Additional descriptive information included that the average age for First Nation women was 20 years, and First Nations women would on average have 3 children. Most First Nation women would be in a common-law marriage, and possess an education level of grade nine. The income levels for 40.7% of these women was under $10,000.00. "Of the female populations, Registered Indians

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12 A person registered or entitled to be registered as an Indian according to the *Indian Act*. The Indian Act exercises exclusive power (allocated to the Canadian Parliament by the Constitution Act, 1867) to determine who shall be recognized as Indian ... from 1876 onwards, the terms *legal, registered,* and *status* have been used interchangeably to denote Indians recognized by the federal government and regulated by the Indian Act (Fiske, 1990-1991, p.5).

on reserve experienced the lowest average total income ($12, 030). Conversely, the female Registered Indian population living off reserve experienced the highest average total income of all the Aboriginal groups ($14,624)" (DIAND, 1996a, p.51). These women sought employment in the fields of business, finance, administration, and sales and service. This study found that First Nation women are more likely to remain on the reservation than men regardless of socio-economic status.

These features described First Nations women who live on the reservation, and have full band membership rights. The profile failed to include information about women's housing conditions, those on social assistance, the rates of alcohol and drug abuse, transportation, child support, and the quality of formal education and non-formal education[13]. These aspects must be acknowledged in order to obtain a realistic understanding of life on the reservation. Schatan (1990) notes that, "aggregate indicators of both economic growth and social change do not show . . . the true evolution of the gap that exists between standards of living of different social groups" (p.69). First Nations women have many incentives for changing their socio-economic status. One way to do this is by obtaining University or College training to increase their opportunities on and off the reserve.

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13 Non-formal education includes traditional activities including the cultural use of sweetgrass, sage, cedar, and hide tanning, wild meat preparation, story telling, teasing, etc ...

## 2.4 Formally Educated First Nations Women

It is essential to examine issues pertinent to understanding First Nation women because women make up at least half of the vast majority of First Nations and care for a large proportion of reserve population. First Nation women have focused on community development and economic development to address their community's needs. Aboriginal women often seek managerial and administrative training and subsequent employment within the band as a method to influence the decision-making process:

> Women frequently achieved influence through their positions on advisory committees established by elected councils. Indeed, as the administrative response of reserve governments expanded, women were finding new opportunities to exert influence. Paraprofessional and managerial jobs created by the newly founded local bureaucracies not only generated employment for women; they fashioned new avenues for directing public affairs and public offices. From their administrative positions as well as from their voluntary associations, women sustained enduring influence over state officials (Fiske, 1995, p. 14).

Degen (1985) found similar results; that is, university students who remained students for more than twelve months were often employed in the categories of professional/managerial. Miller (1994b) classifies these women as "technocrats - those women with specialized education, training, and expertise in dealing with external bureaucracies" (p.28). He found these women were more likely to become leaders, especially with strong kinship ties to support them.

Native women are capable of attaining an education in non-traditional occupations and are encouraged by national women's organizations to do so:

> To the contrary, rather than settling for stereotyped "women's work," Bibiane Curtois of the Quebec Native Women's Association says women tend to set their goals high. Curtois calls for training in administration and management as the key to decision-making roles in the

> community. Once women are empowered and in more positions of power, they will be able to effectively implement broader strategies of development serving women's goals. Curtois argues that "women want jobs that can be beneficial to their community. They want to contribute to the means whereby their communities will become independent". By stressing community as well as household, Curtois is proposing an employment and education strategy aimed at both economic and political development goals of women (Elias, 1991, p. 165).

According to Treaty six negotiations, access to a formal education is a right that First Nations women can exercise to obtain their education. Once they have obtained their formal education they can return to their communities and begin to implement their new knowledge and skills (Baxter, 1993; Bell, Denton, & Nkomo, 1993; & Fleras & Elliot, 1996). Boldt (1981) in his study on native leadership found that "women leaders, as a group, were better educated and, . . . local cultural orientation tends to diminish with higher education" (p.322). To the contrary, there are many Aboriginal people who view education as an essential tool for cultural survival. They are the "new Cree" or "the modern Cree" with the understanding of political, social and economic change and progress, who have the skills to implement these changes for the benefit of the community (Garrett, 1996; & Muller, 1998).

There are currently more Native women in post-secondary education than men. According to INAC, 66.5% of the 23,206 First Nations post-secondary students are women (FNM, April/May 2000, p.9). Women who are seeking a post secondary level of education are doing so in the areas of administration, business, education and management. The 1996 publication on Aboriginal women documents this trend:

> Women comprise the majority of students in all areas of study with the exception of engineering and applied studies. In turn, the greatest proportions of Aboriginal women may be found in the areas of commerce, management and business administration; health profession, sciences and technology; and educational, recreation and counseling services . . .

> Although a large percentage of Aboriginal men and women study in the area of commerce, management and business administration - 31.2% of the Aboriginal female population are found in this area of study compared to 10.7% of the Aboriginal male population (DIAND, 1996a, p. 32).

## 2.5 In-Group Acceptance

Prior to the pursuit of a formal education, First Nations women are very similar to their counterparts in the community:

> The social groups with which an individual identifies are key determinants of many aspects of that individual's thoughts, feelings, and social behavior (Smith, Murphy & Coats 1999, p.94).

Allowing one to identify with a group creates cohesion and pursuit of a shared goal which often supercedes the individual goal. Sherif & Sherif (1956) termed the pursuit of a shared goal as the 'super-ordinate goal' of the group, which is often the result of deprivation. This concept is shared in relative deprivation theory which:

> is the result of a social comparison which implies that the person making the comparison is not receiving valued resources to which he or she feels entitled. Thus, relative deprivation is a perception that an expectation has been violated (the cognitive component) as well as feelings of injustice, dissatisfaction, discontent, and outrage at this violation (Grant & Brown 1995, p .196).

Once they have obtained a formal education, these women are sometimes no longer considered to be community members. A formal education prepares these women for employment in professions for which they are qualified and the opportunity to improve their standard of living.

Although non-educated women and men, have the same opportunities to pursue an education, they do not and in turn have difficulty accepting their educated counterparts and their improved standard of living. Within the Band, community members compare each other on the basis of formal education, and on the basis of how well members fit within mainstream society.

The reserve is not an isolated unit and must co-exist within mainstream more-urban Canada. First Nations members find the current relationship between Native groups and mainstream society to be ineffective, as demonstrated in the socio-economic differences between the majority of reserves in Canada and mainstream society. The injustice of poor living conditions is understood as a partial result of the dishonor to formally signed treaties. First Nations people often point out that such treaties were based on mutual respect and faith, on the part of their ancestors, that by surrendering their lands they would be entitled to certain benefits that would assist with their socio-economic stability (Honore,1997). Poverty and disillusionment with the crown governments have made these women aware of their relative deprivation of resources compared to mainstream Canada. Through the pursuit of an education, women can begin to address their living situations both internally and externally, to create a healthier future for their children and for generations to come. The belief that what is done today will affect the future is very prevalent among Aboriginal people, and on this basis many of these women overcome obstacles to prepare for the seventh generation (Brayboy & Morgan, 1998; Gunn-Allen 1986).

Many First Nations women see a formal education, not as a method to eliminate their heritage, but as a means for cultural survival. In addition, some believe that the combination of their traditional beliefs and formal education allows them to blend both worlds (Brayboy & Morgan,

1998). Boldt's (1981) study on formally educated Aboriginal leaders found, "the university educated and high income respondents, on the other hand, experienced a greater degree of acceptance in white society and consequently, they were more accepting of metropolitan culture, people and history" (p. 323). Thus, a formal education provides these women with tools for cultural survival within their communities and within mainstream urban-based Canada.

Consequently, some First Nations people propose that traditional education methods be incorporated in schools along with formal education methods:

> The imposed educational systems have restricted our ability to educate our children according to our own philosophy and traditions. ... "Utee-peeyepi." "Come and sit with me," he calls. "It is time for your teachings; come and learn."... He begins his lesson to me about the beaver. He tells me the beaver was the one who helped us to understand the Land, the Soil, the Trees.... I listen and learn the ways of my people, where the Land and all beings - the two-legged, four-legged and winged ones, the Trees, the Land- are all sources of knowledge; where knowledge among all these beings is willingly shared; where walls of a building, works written into countless numbers of textbooks, and paper-certified teachers are no longer the limits of an educational system. I affirm my birthright to be educated as a Sakaw Cree and to ensure that my children and my children's' children for generations to come will have the means to do so as well (Auger, 1997, p. 326-327).

Auger further writes that we must incorporate traditional learning and philosophy with contemporary pedagogy to provide First Nation children with an optimal learning experience. Willeto's study on Navajo youth and cultural and family influence found that traditionalism is not a significant predictor of academic achievement (1999). Willeto (1999) reported that following a traditional lifestyle has neither a negative or positive effect on one's ability to learn. This study suggests that a traditional lifestyle does not negatively influence a formal

education, thus these women can obtain their degrees and retain their culture. However, the reality of First Nations cultural survival depends on the ability to understand the policies and procedures being designed for them, by a foreign government, so that they can determine their future and retain their heritage.

## 2.6 First Nation Women as Managers

First Nation women often seek training in the fields of management, business administration, and education (DIAND, 1996a; Dion Stout & Kipling, 1998; McCoy, 1992; & Muller, 1998). When examining the experiences of First Nations women the factors of gender and race must be explored to understand their levels of success as managers on reservations. Currently, there is inadequate literature on this topic. However, it is known that these women "are worse off than non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men in terms of income levels and employment options" (Fleras, 1996, p.201). McCoy (1992), Miller (1996), and Muller (1998) have observed that First Nations women entering the field of management often become involved in politics to ensure that the needs of women and children are met. The First Nations women's management style often incorporates the values of cooperation, ensuring the group benefits, as opposed to competition and individual benefits (Muller, 1998):

> Consequently, women are seen to focus on collaboration and group attainment at the expense of personal achievement -- an emphasis on previous achievement perfectly in keeping with the maternal child -- rearing role (Schwartz, 1989, p. 221).

Women's leadership style benefits the community. Northcraft & Gutek (1993) found that "women managers are perceived as less aggressive and independent than their male counterparts, though typically possessing better interpersonal skills" (p.220-221). First Nations women's ability to communicate better with people may be associated with greater insight into the plight of community members, and allow First Nations women to develop more appropriate solutions:

> In short, at a time when fundamental decisions are being made with respect to the political, economic and social changes of aboriginal people and their communities, it is quite simply unacceptable not to take advantage of the wisdom and experience of aboriginal women, who often understand the needs and capacities of their communities better than anyone else (Dion Stout & Kipling, 1998, p.12).

## 2.7 Conclusion

According to the existing literature on First Nations people I was able to describe a brief history of First Nations women focusing on their changing roles, the current socio - economic and political status of First Nations' reservations, and provide profile characteristics of First Nation women. From the limited existing literature I have described their reasons for seeking a formal education at the University or College level, and their reasons for returning to their communities. Prior to being subjected to the European patrilineal system of governance, First Nations women's status was equal to or complemented the status of First Nations men. The European system of governance neglected to respect the role of First Nations women and the result was a redefinition of roles by these women. Their struggle, with the predominantly male-dominated First Nations leadership and the State, is an attempt to regain the level of respect they once had. Currently, Aboriginal men dominate the political arena. However, women are increasingly and successfully advocating the need to address issues pertinent to them and their families. Their decisions to participate in politics are often based on necessity to place children, health, and the survival of their people in the forefront of political issues, "my concern is for their future, for their children, and for future generations. As a woman, I draw strength from traditional spiritual people ... from my nation" (Jaimes & Halsey , 1992, p.313).

The literature suggests that First Nations women seek a formal education at the University or College level to change and improve the status quo of politics, and the social and economic status of reservations. Consequently, women have sought formal education in the areas of education, management, administration, and commerce. Their choices reflect their traditional

roles as care-givers, educators, and resource managers. In addition, First Nations women are reported to possess better interpersonal communication skills than First Nations men, making it easier to identify the needs of the community. The skills obtained in these roles are now being acknowledged by community members as a viable resource for leadership:

> First, to many women, present-day political activity is linked to the fulfilment of responsibilities to family. Second, women have assumed the bulk of the responsibility for dealing with the outside world: women act as bankers, deal with schools and agencies, and so on; prior responsibilities for the family could be said to legitimize women's responsibilities. But the existential properties of femininity in some cases have become linked with the modern-day requirements of political life (Miller, 1994a, p.67).

This literature review is based on North American Aboriginal people. I experienced difficulty finding information that specifically addressed Alberta Plains Cree Indians. There is no literature, that I could find, on how First Nation's women are received by their communities when they return with their University or College degrees. Thus, the basis of my research is to address this existing gap in the literature and explore the support systems of these First Nations women and the levels of acceptance from their communities when they return.

When one reads this literature review, one might initially expect these women to have much in common with other minority women. While I do address some of the commonalities Native women might experience based on other minority women's experiences as they pursue a higher education, the group of women in this study are unique. Their unique status stems from their constitutional-legal status as treaty Indians, the evolution of education from an institution of assimilation to one of cultural survival, and the necessity to leave the reserve to obtain an education. In addition these women are an anomaly and inspiration, when one realizes that

these women overcome incredible odds to obtaining their education from lack of childcare and finances to adjusting to the urban environment.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory study on the experiences of Native women who have obtained a University or college degree and returned to First Nations reserves to work. I felt this would be an ideal topic for me to explore, given I am a formally educated Native woman who has worked on First Nations reserves, and I have spoken about these issues with many Native women. The instruments for this qualitative approach are the researcher, and the long face-to-face interview. The interview allowed the respondents to explain how they have been received by their communities and how they perceive their formal education has affected their support and acceptance in their communities.

The Native Research and Scholarship Committee ("Coming to Know," 1996) suggested that, "To have meaningful research, research must be relevant in the lives of the people. As a way of coming to know, it must be able to articulate an understanding of the experiences of the peoples in such a manner that they will be able to find solutions to their problems" (p.2). This approach is recommended by Armstrong (1994), Conti (1996), Dion-Stout & Kipling (1998), Glaser (1978), McCracken (1988), Silverman (1993), Strauss & Corbin (1990), and Wright (1993), and most appropriate for my study given the personal nature of the topic I wished to explore, and my access to the respondents.

I employed a qualitative research design that used an interpretive analysis of semi-structured in-depth interviews. The long face-to-face interview provided the most comprehensive collection of data for analysis to understand this phenomenon. This research required reflection of the respondents on their past and current experiences, and their ways of coping

with perceived obstacles to personal goals. This type of data calls for a time-intensive approach with the respondents, thus a long-interview data collection process. Glaser (1978), McCracken (1988), and Strauss & Corbin (1990), recommend the use of the interview to find the most relevant and accurate data. The focus of this research was on the rich content of the long interview allowing the identification of patterns in responses but not broad generalizations. The fieldnotes and memos were incorporated to chronicle patterns and deviations from patterns identified in my interviews.

I used grounded theory building approach to develop theory as the data were being analyzed. Strauss & Corbin (1990) state, "the grounded theory approach is the qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon," (p. 24). I interviewed 11 women through snowball sampling, using my current contacts in the field. Each respondent received a copy of the questions prior to our meeting date. These questions were developed from a review of relevant literature and information from reconnaissance interviews. The literature review provided the basis for sensitizing the interviewer to detect potentially important data and theoretical concepts. All interviews were entered into computer data format. The data was transcribed, coded, and categorized by using Corel Wordperfect 8 (1995) and the NUD*IST 4 Classic (2000) software program.

### 3.1 Sample Description

The populations of interest in this study are formally educated Native women who are and were employed by First Nations reserves of Alberta. A list of these women was not available.

Therefore, I chose my informants using the snowball sampling method. This method utilized the researcher's personal and professional acquaintances as starting points. As the interviews proceeded the recommended contacts of these women provided the basis for the sample. The population most affected by this study will be those living on First Nations reserves. The criteria for selecting respondents were they must be female over the age of 18, have a post-secondary education, and have current or recurrent (in the past 2 years) employment on a First Nations reserve. The sample size was small due to the nature of the in-depth interview.

### 3.2 Instrumentation

The creation of the questionnaire was based on the review of current literature, and to some extent, the researcher's personal experiences, and preliminary interviews with appropriate informants. The interview guide consisted of 33 questions inquiring about both personal experiences and demographic data. After the initial 3-4 interviews, the questionnaire was modified with the assistance of my advisor, Dr. Krogman, to capture the most relevant data. The instrument of the long face-to-face interview is the individual conducting the interview.

The long interview allowed the respondents to use, clarify or add additional information that the researcher did not know while constructing the questionnaire. The open-ended questions allowed the respondents the opportunity to share in great detail various life experiences or, if they chose, to share very little of their experiences. The respondents were able to relay their understanding of the phenomenon or situation more easily in interviews, describe the context

under which they made decisions, and emphasize what issues were of greatest importance to them. "In qualitative research the researcher, as the instrument, has the responsibility to continually improve the acuity with which the researcher obtains information and gains an understanding about the social phenomenon under study," (McCracken,1988, p.47).

My Cree heritage and understanding of the Cree culture provided an increased awareness of theoretical sensitivity. Glaser (1978), Denscombe, (1998) and Silverman (1993) note that theoretical sensitivity refers to the personal quality of the researcher allowing the researcher to notice more subtle expressions of meaning from the respondents. In my experiences as a formally educated Native woman, I have noticed resistance in Native communities to acknowledge my education and career potential. Given that my biases may interfere with the interpretation of the data, conscious efforts were made to decrease the influence of my biases. My questions have been reviewed by my peers, Dr. Krogman read and checked the first few transcripts for any leading probe questions, and close attention was paid to interview comments that contradicted my expectations. Marshall & Rossman (1995) note, as theory with related concepts emerges from analysis, negative instances will lead to a new data collection and analysis that serve to strengthen theory (p.112). However, the researcher must determine if negative instances are important for understanding the social phenomenon under investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; & Dey, 1993). I think my insider/outsider status allowed me to discriminate well when such negative instances needed to be investigated further.

The interview allowed the researcher to observe and make memos while collecting the data. A memo refers to a link identified by the researcher to other interviews or a conceptual thought

derived from the content of that interview. This allowed the researcher to develop a more comprehensive theory of the social behavior being investigated. Consequently I conducted all interviews as well as transcribed them to ensure accurate interpretation, and to remain intimately familiar with my data.

### 3.3 Procedures

After determining the research focus, my next step was to become familiar with the current literature on my research topic. I am not aware of any study on Native women's transition back to the reserve after obtaining a higher formal education, and I was not able to locate any academic literature which specifically focused on this topic. Therefore, I focused my literature review on the areas of Native women's traditional roles, gender and leadership, formal education, ingroup support and social acceptance of formally educated First Nations women.

The questionnaire construction was informed by the research literature, reconnaissance interviews and my personal experiences. My reconnaissance interviews revealed that a select group of women with post-secondary education, treaty-status, and employment on a First Nations reserve would best allow me to study in particular the coping and adjustment experiences educated Native women have when they work for pay on reserves.

During the initial phone contact to set up interviews, I identified myself as a researcher conducting a study on formally educated Native women who work on reserves and how they

have been received by their communities. I also explained that these interviews honored confidentiality, although I recognized that given the small size of these communities, other residents may be aware that I am conducting these interviews. The usefulness in this study is the addition of academic material to provide an understanding of Native women's decisions to pursue a formal education and to return to the reservation to share their new skills. I informed the informants that the interview would take approximately 45 minutes to 3 hours. Once the respondent agreed, I immediately sent her a copy of the information sheet, and the questionnaire, and made arrangements to meet at a mutually convenient location. McCracken (1988) suggests that one should not take notes while conducting the interview, as it may affect the quality of information from the respondent. In contrast, Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest that notes should be taken during interviews to assist with data analysis. I wrote brief notes during the interview, and more detailed notes afterwards. These notes were crucial during the analysis of the data, which ensured the process of grounded theory (Ratcliff, 1995a). At the completion of the interview each respondent signed a consent form. To ensure anonymity each respondent received a numeric identifier on the transcription of their interview.

Prior to beginning these interviews, I received approval from the Human Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics at the University of Alberta.

## 3.4 TABLE: RESEARCH TIMELINE 1999-2001

| | September | October | November | December | January | February | March | April | May | June | July | August | September | October | November | December | January | February | March | April | May | June | July | August |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Review of relevant literature | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Snowball sampling and interviewing | X | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Typing up all field notes and organizing data | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Data analysis | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | | |
| Coding interviews | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | | | |
| Thesis writing and revisions | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X |
| Thesis defense | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | X | |

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Grounded theory methodology provides that data analysis occurs concurrently with data collection, and the specific focus emerges as the analysis proceeds (Glaser, 1998; & Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The initial analysis began with the transcription of the tape-recorded interview to improve efficiency of the emerging theory (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). I conducted all of the interviews, and transcribed the interviews, to maintain close familiarity with the data to assist with the emerging theoretical framework.

The data analysis process consisted of developing conceptual categories of related behaviors which that lead to general concepts based on a comparison of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This is also known as comparative analysis within or between a number of data sources (interviews). This process consisted of three steps. The first step began with open coding of the data into related concepts, the NUD*IST 4 Classic software program called them 'nodes'. The concepts identified a central idea in behavior or experience. These codes were compared to find consistencies, differences, and similar thoughts and experiences to produce categories. This process is also known as axial coding. "We could say that categories must have two aspects, an internal aspect - they must be meaningful in relation to the data - and an external aspect - they must be meaningful in relation to the other categories" (Dey, 1993, pp. 96-97). The next process "involves selected coding where the 'core category', or central category that ties all other categories in the theory together is identified and related to other categories" (Becker, 1993, p.1).

The data was organized into categories which explained the key social actions of the

interviewees. These key actions were later linked together to provide one core explanation of the phenomenon. Eventually the categories became saturated, that is, no codes could be added. Some of these categories began to dominate the analysis, becoming the central focus. This linking of the core categories helped develop a theory to provide a better understanding of this social phenomenon. Using NUD*IST 4 Classic I found 143 nodes , and through extensive refinement, I further coded them into seven main categories: personal characteristics, formal education, key issues on reserve, no acceptance, acceptance, and future leadership roles. These seven categories became the focus of my analysis and provided the basis for my theoretical framework.

Marshall & Rossman (1995) suggests that the theory must identify salient, grounded categories of meaning held by participants in the setting in order for the theory to be valid. The researcher combined data collection and analysis to improve the levels of density and saturation to provide a reliable and valid theory (Kirk & Miller, 1986; & Pandit, 1996). This was done by maintaining fieldnotes, memos, methodological notes and theoretical notes. By using small sticky notes, containing this data, pasted on the wall, the researcher was able to visualize the development of the theory. Throughout these processes the researcher continued to ask questions, making comparisons of the categories and noted these questions in the memos to assist with the revealing of the theory. Ratcliff (1995b) lists five ways to find validity in qualitative research: 1) Divergence from initial expectations. I noted how my initial expectations and findings changed throughout the analysis; 2) Convergence with other sources of data: my findings were compared to similar studies; 3) Extensive quotations: the transcripts and notes provided the basis for these quotes; 4) Independent checks: regular contact was

maintained with Dr. Krogman to review interviews, transcripts and discuss grounded theory; and 5) Member checks: I checked with interviewees for clarification and approval of my interpretation of their words when I deemed it necessary.

Reliability was difficult to determine because the basis of obtaining the data could be a shared bias for the researcher and the subject. Therefore, the focus was to ensure the collection methods were done with properly working equipment and to replicate the collection site. The collection site was a safe and comfortable site without distraction at a place convenient for the subjects. Silverman (1993) notes, "the key aspects of reliability involve selection to what is recorded, the technical quality of recordings and the adequacy of transcripts," (p.206).

Obtaining validity for this research was a crucial part of the process for understanding the experiences of these women. Dey (1993) notes that "a valid account is one which can be defended as sound because it is well -grounded conceptually and empirically", (p.228). It must make sense and account for the data. Neuman (1997) states, "construct validity is for measures with multiple indicators. It addresses the question: If the measure is valid, do the various indicators operate in a consistent manner? It requires a definition with clearly specifies conceptual boundaries" (p.144). This research used a questionnaire with multiple indicators as embodied in questions and probe questions, to help gain an understanding of the experiences of First Nations women working on reserves.

The interpretation of the data required the use of member checking, triangulation, and asking the right people. When member checking the researcher ensured that what was said during the interview was what was meant to be said. Member checking increased the accuracy of the

data collected and confirmed some of my interpretations.

Triangulation involved the use of documents, observations and checking with other researchers to ensure that what is being interpreted was accurate. Triangulation provided some additional information for the construction of the interview to ensure that the most appropriate questions were being asked.

Lastly, the researcher should be assured s/he is sampling the right people. The people being interviewed should be authorities on the matter. My selection criteria provided an appropriate sample size and selection characteristics. The data collected was rich and extensive but not overwhelming. The women selected for this study all met the criteria and were authorities on this matter.

### 3.6 Limitations and Strengths

One of the strengths of this study is that I am Cree and have an enriched understanding of the general socio- economic and socio-political conditions pertaining to formally educated First Nations Cree women. Another strength is the potential contribution to the academic literature about Cree women from a sociologist's perspective.

Weaknesses of this study are that my personal experiences may have distorted my interpretations. If the researcher maintains preconceived ideas she may be looking for evidence in the wrong place and should think of alternative accounts (Dey, 1993; Denscombe, 1998; & Marshall & Rossman, 1995). I became aware of my own biases, by maintaining regular

consultations with Dr. Krogman, and set them aside by utilizing the constant comparative method of analysis. Also, the semi-structured questionnaire format reduced the possibility of leading the informant's responses. In addition, Dr. Krogman reviewed the first few transcriptions to ensure that informants were not being led into specific responses. Furthermore, McCracken (1988), writes:

> We have noted above that deep and long -- lived familiarity with the culture under study has, potentially, the grave effect of dulling the investigator's power of observation and analysis. But it also has the advantage of giving the investigator an extraordinarily intimate acquaintance with the object of study. This acquaintance gives the investigator a fineness of touch and delicacy of insight that few ethnographers working in other cultures can hope to develop (p. 32).

The sample size may be too limited to make generalizations, thus making external validity difficult to obtain. However, I obtained very descriptive data not obtainable with a larger sample. In addition, the time period for data collection limited the depth of issues uncovered and explored. Therefore, it was essential that the questionnaire was designed and modified as required to obtain the most appropriate data.

# CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The results reported in this chapter are based on interview data. The term 'participants' includes all the aboriginal women who participated in this study. The women selected for this study met the basic criteria of being between the ages of 18 - 65 years, possess a university or college level education, grew up on or nearby an Indian reservation. In addition these women have been employed with a Treaty Six organization or Indian reservation. Eleven women participated in this study by sharing their experiences of working with First Nations people, and their involvement with First Nations reserves. The interviews were conducted over a five month period beginning on June 8, 2000, and were arranged at the convenience of the participants. There were a number of themes discovered in the transcriptions. These themes were condensed into eight main concepts. The first category provides a description of the participants, themes of self-reflection, and self-identified personal characteristics that helped them pursue their goals. The second section covered the themes of support systems, and acceptance or no acceptance in the community.

## 4.1 Participant Description

The participants (n=11) covered an age span of 24 - 61 years (Appendix A), earn an average income of $ 40,525.27 (Appendix B), are formally educated (Appendix C), and all work for aboriginal organizations that service First Nations people in the treaty six region in Alberta. The types of occupations of the participants include social workers, teachers, researchers, cultural coordinators, directors of social programs, and regional home-care coordinators. In

addition, the average number of siblings is five. Fifty-one percent of the participants grew up on Indian reservations. The remainder grew up near Indian reservations and participated in reservation life.

TABLE B: MARITAL STATUS

| Marital Status | Number of Participants |
|---|---|
| Married | 4 |
| Common-law | 4 |
| Widowed | 1 |
| Single | 2 |

TABLE C: CHILDHOOD RESIDENCE PATTERNS

| | Rural Residence | Urban Residence |
|---|---|---|
| Childhood | 10 | 1 |
| Primary School | 10 | 1 |
| Secondary School | 8 | 3 |
| Post-Secondary School | 0 | 11 |

The remaining information was gained through semi-structured in-depth long interviews. This information provided the raw data for the coding, and categorizing of data, and the basis of grounded theory.

## 4.2 Self-Reflection

The participants in this study chose to go to school for a variety of reasons, including a desire to improve their living conditions, to accommodate the expectations of family members, and a few believed it was predetermined. Some women pursued a formal education to increase the levels of respect shown to them from colleagues, family and those in higher-level management positions. Each of the women involved in this study grew up in poverty on and near reserves. Many of the respondents shared their childhood experiences and the struggles their parents faced to ensure they were clothed, fed and sheltered. This experience of poverty made them all the more committed to finding a way out of poverty through higher education and the employment opportunity it brings. From these beginnings the value of an education was instilled in them as a way to improve their standard of living.

> We were very poor and I always wanted something better and not necessarily leave my home and my environment. But I wanted something better that could make things better (Interview # 109, p.2, lines 35-37).[14]

> I think also because my mom finished University and what she taught us about how important a degree is [to improving your standard of living and levels of respect shown to you]. Like you could always fall back on a degree. People won't respect you unless you have a degree. Things you say people will take seriously, if you have that degree backing you up (Interview # 101, p.3, lines 3-6).

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[14] The interview numbers at the end of each quote are a part of a coding system that allows the participant to remain anonymous and does not reflect the sample size.

### 4.2.1 Personal Characteristics

The majority of the participants shared the following self-identified characteristics:

**Stubbornness.** The majority of the participants identified themselves as being stubborn and headstrong. They stated that they grew up facing many obstacles and overcame them with this characteristic. In addition, the term 'achiever' was used by a number of the participants to describe a characteristic about themselves. Once they commit themselves to a goal, these women unanimously held they would work hard to reach their goal.

> I think it had to do with how I perceived my role in the family. [I was seen] As someone who could direct them as well as being stubborn. Once I start something I have to finish it. I had started it and I was going to finish it regardless (Interview # 107, p. 4, lines 6-8).

> I also have natural characteristics of being stubborn, being very bold and head strong and when I want something I go for it and I don't stop until I get it. Even though it is kind of seen in the white society as a negative thing to be stubborn, in the native society to try and survive in this world, it is a good thing ... it gets you through. (Interview # 110, p.3, lines 3-7).

**Individual pursuit of education is for the whole family.** The majority of the participants believed that they pursued a formal education to fulfil the wishes of a significant family member. This significant family member was often a parent. In many cases, the respondents reported that their parents encouraged them to pursue a formal education because of their parent's belief in the value of an education. In two cases the respondent pursued their education to take advantage of an opportunity that a sibling was not able to. For example, one

participant noted that her pursuit of a formal education was inspired by one of her siblings inability to pursue a formal education because of poor health and a short life span. The participants pursuit of a formal education benefits the whole family by eventually becoming a source of income, respect from the community, and an education that fosters their understanding of their society.

> He [father] wanted me more than anything [any of the accomplishments that she could attain] in the world to get a university degree. He thought it was the most important thing to be able to get out of a small town and to get yourself where you wanted to go. He felt the women needed to be strong and to support themselves and not look for support from other people (Interview # 107, p.3, lines 38-39, & p.4. lines 1-3).

> I remember in my second year, I got the highest mark in ... an honours physics program, and I phoned my mom and told her. She said, "oh, there must be a mistake". Really truly. And I phoned my dad and, they were separated by then, and he said, "Oh, I knew you could do it, just go for it" (Interview # 106, p.2, line 43; & p.3, lines 1-3).

> The first thing is probably because I am so stubborn. I like to finish what I start. I think the very basic thing that made me achieve everything was my late brother because he was mentally and physically handicapped. I always believed that I had to do something because he never had a chance to (Interview # 101, p.2, lines 34-37).

**Rebelliousness.** This category was created on the assumption that being rebellious is understood to mean to go against the normally accepted patterns of behaviour. Based on the interpretation of the interview data one may conclude that it is unusual for Aboriginal people to obtain a university degree and accepted behaviour is to resist formal education. This value

may have its origins in the *Indian Act of 1869*[15], which specifically stated, and was Canadian law, that if a registered Treaty Indian registered for University, they would loose their treaty status and become Canadian citizens. This may have been interpreted by registered Indians as a threat to their existence and not advantageous. Therefore, obtaining a university degree meant that one was no longer an Indian.

> A lot more people had gone to university and people also realized people weren't coming back to change the community. People were coming back to help the community. People were coming back with ideas that could help the community. There are a lot of good things in the community and those are the things we have to build on. I think that, in our community, that is something that changed. Now if someone goes to university people are really happy. People don't feel intimidated by it anymore. I remember when I first came back, when I first graduated from university, people used to ask me things like, "Do you still speak Cree?". It never dawned on me until later, that is what they were talking about. Had I become white, had I become assimilated where I forgot to speak Cree. I didn't realize it until later. Do you still do this, so you still do that? I think people were afraid. Now it is not questioned people realize that you can have an education and you can be part of the community and respect the community (Interview # 105, p. 4, lines 18-29).

This law remained in effect until the 1950's. The amendment to this section of the Indian Act meant that education could be pursued without losing one's treaty Indian status. Education is a Treaty Six right, that is the government must provide formal education for all status Indians. In the research available on First Nations people very few are completing a university

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15 Every Indian who is admitted to the degree of doctor of medicine, or to any other degree, by any University of learning, or who is admitted, in any Province of Canada, ... may, upon petition to the Superintendent General, *ipso facto* become and be enfranchised under this Act - Section 86, Chapter 43 of the 1886 Indian Act: (DIAND, 1993, p. 73).

degree[16], and the majority tend to withdraw from school at grade nine ( Deprez, 1976; & DIAND 1996b). The women in this study are in the small percentage who have successfully obtained college or university degrees.

A recurring theme in the interviews was that going to college or university required resisting and in some cases fighting against strong messages from their communities that higher education was not compatible with being Aboriginal. My older respondents (above 45 years of age) had less family support when they began their post-secondary education. For example, a participant recalled that when she was entering grade nine her mother told her she did not have to go to school because her role was to become a wife and mother. This participant chose, instead, to pursue her education. Another participant recalled when she left her home to attend high school in a major urban area, against the wishes of her father. Her father sold her horse because she was no longer home and fulfilling her role on the farm. Contrary to the worries some family and community members have had, each respondent noted that a formal non-Cree education enhanced their Cree identity.

The participants in this study completed high school and achieved a post secondary degree, diploma or certificate. In fact, seven of the participants each held one or two University degrees including Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Each of these participants identified themselves as being rebellious. In this study rebelling has a three-fold explanation; first,

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Despite general improvements in educational attainment, Aboriginal people in this age group [20-29] remained only one-half as likely to have completed school [compared to the National averages] (The Daily, 1998, p.6).

Although overall education levels remain lower for young Aboriginal adults, census data provide evidence that Aboriginal people have a greater tendency than non-Aboriginal individuals to return to school as adults (The Daily, 1998, p.7).

rebelliousness involves resisting the wishes of their families to follow a more traditional lifestyle of placing a priority on marriage and children over the priority to pursue a formal education. Second, rebelliousness involves obtaining a formal education while maintaining their Cree culture. Third, rebelliousness involves rebelling against state induced poverty[17]. Therefore the pursuit of a formal education means complimenting their Cree heritage:

> This resistance represents not only a reluctance to accept White folk theory that "the only good Indian is a non-Indian," but, more assertively it is a statement of the desirability of being Indian, rather than becoming Anglo (Deyhle, 1998, p.7).

Thus, the women are using education as a vehicle to rebel against state-induced assimilation policies. In addition, the state has created political and socio-economic dependent communities where these women have witnessed the effects of the state's decisions. These women have pursued a formal education to try to alleviate the poverty experienced on reserves, and to be part of the movement for more community-generated independence on reserves (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992; & Kates, 1996).

### 4.3 Support Systems

The study participants identified two key sources of support while completing their studies, i.e., family and personal spirituality.

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17 Relative deprivation theory of rebellion, "where value expectations are the amount of important goods and conditions of life to which people feel rightfully entitled and value capabilities are their assessment of what they actually have," (Muller & Weede, 1994, p.41).

**Family.** The majority of the participants, particularly those younger than 45 years of age, noted that education was valued in their families. Family provided a central network of support for the participants. Some noted that although their parents lacked a secondary education, and in some cases lacked primary schooling, and frequently could not comprehend the complexities involved in attending a university, they still provided emotional support, financial support, and assistance with childcare. Other participants recalled stories of encouragement from significant family members when they were struggling with their academic and motherhood responsibilities. Some participants recalled times when their kitchen cupboards were empty and their siblings brought food and money. In some cases, where the participants were single mothers, their children became significant support systems and worked to accommodate their mother's study schedule. These mothers reported that they were determined to complete their studies so that they were positive role models for their children.

> The strength that I have is through my kids -- they are very kind hearted, very giving, and have so many strengths that [encouraged me to complete my degree]. They were very respectful, and had a lot of good humour. I remember, you know times, I would go pick up the kids from the daycare, my oldest child [7 years of age], his friends would be asking him if they could come and visit and play. Even at that young age he would tell them, "My mom has to study and we can't bother her, we have to be quiet". And then having my other children come and talk to me, and my oldest son telling them again, " Don't bug mom, she is doing her homework". They had given me strength, even now my children at a young age talk about going to university and they talk about going to college and how they want me to help them set up their places ( Interview # 110, p.4, lines 22-30).

**Spirituality.** The topic of spirituality often came up during the interviews. This is a topic that is difficult to define because it is an abstract concept. The shared belief was in that of a power

greater than themselves who played a role in their daily lives. A number of the participants acknowledged this power as the creator and controller of their destiny. One participant noted the following while answering the question: Why did you pursue a formal education?

> Part of it was like a path that was chosen for me. I didn't even think about it, in the sense that, I am going to do this, I am going to have this job, I am going to have all this money. I didn't think about it that way at all (Interview # 110, p.6, lines 32 -36).

Another participant responded with the following statement:

> There was a huge period of time when woman were picking up the pipes for their children and families because the men weren't honouring their pipes. They were abusing women, they were drinking, and so they were creating more problems with their pipes. So the women pick up the pipes to bring the honour to their own lives and in that process when women honour themselves, then the men will once again honour the women (Interview # 106, p.13, lines 12-16).

In Plains Indian culture the pipe is a sacred object with a life force of it's own, "the Sacred Pipe's ultimate meaning is in its sacramental nature because it is a Native American symbol that makes all of life sacred" (Steinmetz, 1998, p.100). Steinmetz (1998) further writes:

> Native American attitudes toward the Sacred Pipe further understanding of its sacramental nature by showing that the pipe is set apart and, consequently, is surrounded by taboos and strict rules. Its power must be safeguarded. Because the Sacred Pipe is both beneficial and dangerous, it is both loved and feared (p.119).

Respect for the sacredness of the pipe decreased through the centuries with legislature that banned its use and an educational system designed for assimilation (Gunn Allen, 1986; & Baird-Olson & Ward, 2000). The significance and religious value of the pipe and is now being openly revived. The role of men was explicitly tied to their treatment of their pipes as it gave understanding to their identity, social role, and prestige in their communities (Hungry

Wolf, 1996a; & Steinmetz, 1998). There have been many factors contributing to the development of social chaos, including colonization which attempted to remove native culture, "with the formation of Canada in 1867, however, both religion and healing were targeted by the federal government and churches as part of formal policies designed to assimilate and "civilize" the Aboriginal inhabitants" (Waldram, 1997, p.6).

These policies included banning of significant spiritual ceremonies that included the use of the pipe, restricted mobility on the reserve which meant if a person wanted to leave the reserve he or she required a pass from an Indian agent, and enforced attendance of residential schools that were designed to assimilate the students. These policies remained in effect until the early 1950's (Waldram, 1997). These policies have devastated First Nations people and their communities. The sacredness of the pipe and it's responsibility of teaching appropriate social roles has been destroyed through colonization.

Formal education allowed some of the participants to gain an understanding of the negative results of colonization, and to adapt in a way they felt was respectful of their culture. The sanctity of the pipes provided the direction and understanding of society (Wyrostok,1997). When the pipe holders were destroyed through the use of shame, alcohol, drugs, and foreign religions, several of the women in this study reported that they had to take the place of the men to carry the pipes and undo the damage, and create a strong and healthy society of well-educated people in both realms of Cree and general societies.

## 4.4 Role of Formal Education in Cree Identity

One of the interview questions was, " Has your formal education changed your identity as a Cree person? If so, how? " This question is important given that some scholars argue that many Native people feel they lose their identity as Indians when they obtain white, formal education (Crowfoot, 1997; Fleras, 1996; & Friesen & Orr, 1998). The response was that formal education retained, reinforced, and in some cases enhanced their Cree heritage.

> I've always been a Cree Indian and I always will be. Education has not changed that. Education has made me understand some of the pain that myself and other fellow aboriginals have gone through ... And I have never been ashamed of who I am (Interview # 102, P.3, lines 34 -36; & p.4, lines 1-3).

> And as I continued my education, my identity as a Cree person developed into one of pride and strength, and dignity and so for all these things they [those who did not understand or demonstrate respect for my culture] knocked me down ... well now as a woman it just makes me stronger (Interview # 110,p.2, lines 28-31).

> ... if anything it has probably enhanced it [my Cree heritage], it [formal education] has probably added to it [my Cree heritage]. It's [formal education] made me more aware and proud of who I am. It has gone in exactly the opposite way [her identity becoming assimilated into the pre-dominantly non-native society](Interview # 105, p.1, lines 23-24).

In the past in Canadian Native societies it has been part of the women's role to take care of the family (Bonvillain, 1989; & Hungry Wolf, 1996). Obtaining a formal education enables these women to fulfil their responsibility to take care of their family because they have the skills and knowledge necessary to compete for higher employment, and establish themselves in viable and prosperous careers (Lepage-Lees, 1998). Many participants maintained that formal education cultivated a greater compassion for Cree people, and in some ways, more self acceptance.

> My education has made me more understanding of Cree people. Especially with regards to the residential schools, I had never really heard of them before until I went to University. And now I understand all the things that my ancestors have gone through and why we have so many social problems now (Interview # 101, p.2, lines 25-26).

> No, I've always been a Cree Indian and I always will be. Education has not changed that. Education has made me understand some of the pain that myself and other fellow aboriginals have gone through. (Interview # 102, P.3, lines 34 -36).

## 4.5 Superordinate Goals and Priorities of Concern

The participants identified three issues regarding social change that needed to be addressed on reserves: childcare, violence, and social programs.

**Childcare.** Participants stated that inadequate childcare while going to school or work was a key issue. They noted it was difficult to go to school or a place of employment when they could not find childcare. Some participants noted that childcare and maintenance of the home is generally the primary responsibility of women, which makes it difficult to hold professional full-time positions.

> For aboriginal women I find the one thing that is lacking, and the main thing that needs to be looked at, is childcare. A lot of the aboriginal women who are educated or are professionals or are working have a lot of problems with childcare (Interview # 110, p.8, lines 37-39).

> Women have to find childcare. There [are] a lot of two income households on the reserve... a lot of younger couples where the husband and wife both work. Yet the wife has to make the lunch and breakfast for the children, she has to take the kids to daycare, send them off to school, and she has to make supper. She has to take care of everything. At the same time daycare is not a priority [for the reserves], if the kid is sick, it is the mother who has to stay home (Interview # 105, p. 10, lines 6-10).

Childhood education was a concern addressed as a part of the issue of childcare. Currently, education is not deemed as a priority for community development on most reservations (Aboriginal-Accountability, 1999; & Dion-Stout, 1998). Participants stated that the management of reserve funds is determined by chief and council. They argue male-dominated leadership often results in mis-use of band funds, i.e., a diversion of educational funds to other purposes. In their opinion funds designated for education should be spent on children's and youth's education. Consequently, they argue that as women assume management positions, education would become a priority.

> Well it seems, in my school, the First Nation women are very pro-education and they get very upset when the money that is supposed to be spent in the school is spent elsewhere. And I don't think that men realize how much of an investment it is in our children. Or how important they are. They just see paying bills, paying ... , putting the money to use in other places. And yet, it is supposed to be used for education. So the women are really pushing for education. And I think that if there were more ladies in power in council or as chief, our schools would be a lot different. There would be a lot more spent on the schools. And [there would be] workshops for parents, things of that nature. (Interview # 101, p.9, lines 13-20).

> I see, and this is my philosophy, I would see education as improving the standard of living on reserves, but that's not for many years to come. Right now I see the reserves going down because, now again I'm expressing my opinions, and it is the local government that has been given and forced on native reserves [a foreign governance system forced onto First Nations' people by the Canadian government]. I see education is going to be a low priority again. Because the money will come as cap funding and you can only fund so many people to go to school, and if the reserve people don't have objective people looking after education they will fund their friends and family and these people possibly will squander the money and those people that really need it, really have the desire to go will not be afforded the opportunity and therefore the education will go down again (Interview #102,p.8, lines 1-8).

**Violence.** Violence on First Nations' reserves is highly prevalent (Canada, 1996a; & Dion-Stout, 1998). Participants expressed a concern about violence on the reserve and how it is becoming more acceptable. Violence was experienced in some form by a number of the participants. In addition, the women in my study were aware of many other Native women's stories of violence in their homes. The participants often had professional care-giving roles such as teachers, social workers or guidance counsellors; in this capacity they were privy to the private lives of many people on the reserves. For some of the participants they shared their own stories of violence and how it affected their lives. Overall, the reported belief shared by the participants was violence was wrong and should be addressed by First Nation leadership.

> There is this whole attitude [by people living on the reserve], when it gets bad enough [violence] maybe they [those who are directly experiencing the violence] will get out [of the reserve]. I don't see enough preventative action and support and I think it becomes very common place. ... I think you come to a point when you don't even, you can't really say that this [violence] is bad anymore. It's very much a part of the life [on the reserve] and so I think one of the things [issues to be addressed] is violence. This is something [violence] that is very much hidden and it depends who your family is and maybe that family is more prone to that [violence], or they have always been like that [acceptance of violence is normal]. That particular person [who has a history of violence] may be in a power position on the reserve and maybe no one wants to talk about it, so it could influence other things [employment and access to resources]. (Interview # 108, p.7, lines 26 - 35).

> The issue of violence [is a major concern]. Violence against women [is very visible in native relationships, particularly for those who live on the reservation]. Raising daughters that see violence as [an acceptable] part of a relationship. I don't see that as acceptable (Interview # 105, lines 16-17).

The participants noted that violence is common between couples. The women often have to endure physical abuse, at the hands of their spouses, in order to obtain their goals. One of these

goals is a formal education. The following is a story shared by one of the participants about a couple who were from a local reservation and the woman in the relationship wanted to go to school:

> ... spouses at home sometimes don't support the woman going to school. And in this case this lady [a student in college from the reserve] was in exam week and her husband beat her up. She had to go to the woman's shelter and from there she had to go to school. This was a secret thing, her ride would come and bring her secretly to do her exams and take her back. That's how she had to go to school and that's how she obtained her higher education (Interview # 102, p.8, lines 25-30).

**Social Programs.** The majority expressed their support for social programs, while a few participants mentioned the need for more economic development-based programs. By caring for the individual through social programs, many women felt their reserves would produce a stronger and healthier workforce, which would eventually lead to a stronger economy and improved standard of living for all residents on the reserve. The social programs included women's wellness centres, after-school care programs for children, better and more healthcare, elder's programs and substance-abuse programs.

> It has to be concentrated around the social programs to strengthen the family. Once the family is strengthened, the health gets better, the participation in the community is already there because you have strengthened the family (Interview # 104, p.8, lines 25 -27).

> We need to start at the grassroots with c&c [chief and council], start with your children, your grandchildren. You know, to make them feel good about themselves whether they are Cree, Chip, whatever. That they can get along in the white world as long as getting along in their own community because you need to balance those two as well (Interview # 103, p. 8, lines 20-23).

## 4.6 Acceptance

This category was divided into three sub-categories: encouragement and then rejection, management and "women are better leaders". Encouragement was developed from the concepts that related to support from chief and council, as well as family and community members who encouraged them to pursue a university or college education. The rejection came from the lack of employment opportunities on the reserve and the unwillingness of community members to accept them back. Rugel & Barry's (1990) study of small group interaction found that when group members have a low perception of self-worth, they tend to perceive the changes in a formally educated person as "becoming white" (Cooper & Russell, 1986). The management category reflects the comments these women expressed suggesting they would be better at management positions given their combination of formal education, employment experience and traditional roles in the community (Katz & St. Denis, 1991). The "women are better leaders" category reflects the personal characteristics that reflect better leadership qualities, such as better listening skills based on direct contact with community members (Johnson & Bechler, 1998). Acceptance is defined as to what extent the study participants were able to obtain employment in their home community, and if applicable, on an Indian reservation.

**Encouragement and then rejected.** Formal education is promoted by the leadership, chief and council in the communities of many of these women. However, once these women obtained their degrees, employment opportunities and job security were not enthusiastically granted by the Band leadership. Some participants stated that becoming employed in the community

would allow them the opportunity to try and change the current socio-economic status of the reserve and could possibly lead to a change in politicians. These women reported that their chief and council often become uncomfortable with the hiring of educated native women, and appeared to see it as a threat to their own held positions. As such, new employment opportunities were not created, and positions currently held by either uneducated and inexperienced people, or non-native people, were generally not accessible to Native educated and experienced women. One participant shared her thoughts on why chief and council were unwilling to provide employment opportunities:

> I think that from my back home perspective there needs to be structures and capacity building in communities that encourages people to come back to work, also an open door policy [that encourages recent graduates to return to the reserve and be employed in suitable positions based on education and experience.] Rather than having opportunities for employment and access to resources based on family ties, graduates would have fair access. ... (Interview # 107, p.9, lines 33-39).

In addition one participant shared her belief that chief and council have created a dependent system of resource distribution by encouraging dependence on the welfare system. Chief and council are in control of this system and often use it to sway the votes of the membership, by providing preferential loans, jobs, or access to resources for relatives. For example, a chief might withhold welfare payments, or increase the payment amount given, depending on a person's promised vote. To create an economically independent system would mean chief and council no longer have resources and opportunities to give out as political "favours". Without jobs the band membership is dependent upon the leadership for the necessities of life. Finally, the participants noted that under ideal conditions, formally educated people would be

encouraged to return to the reserve to share their skills and knowledge to change the political and socio-economic status of the reserve.

**Management.** The participants stated that formally-educated people would be more suitable for management positions. These positions included program directors, band councillor positions or the position of chief. Participants noted that management-capacity positions would allow them to have direct input into community development initiatives and programs. All women in this study expressed their intentions were to benefit aboriginal people. This information was gathered when I asked the question, "Ideally, what position would you eventually like to hold on this reserve?' The majority of the participants would like to hold positions of management and leadership to make effective changes in their communities.

> ... if I was a manager and [would] go to meetings and speak, people would listen to me. ...I want action, I need action. In order to justify what I say [as a manager, it would] help me get through the different things I am trying to do ... for our people. Talk is cheap and I am getting tired of the talk, I am getting tired of the people saying all these good wonderful things and I think it is about time the government does something really significant and solid [in a management position I would be able to accomplish this]. (Interview # 110, p.9, lines 31 - 35).

> Of course chief. That's right. Because as far as I know chiefs have always been dictators. I want to be chief so I could get some real good well-skilled, "number one" skilled people. And pay people what they are qualified for. Don't go and pay a person $3000.00 because they are your wife or husband, and then have a skilled person take half of that pay home (Interview #109, p.11, lines 21-24).

**Women are better leaders.** Most participants stated they believe women make better leaders because of their increased levels of formal education, their genuine concern for the well-being of their family, their virtue of patience, and negotiation and collaborative decision-making skills.

> I would like to be a respected elder someday on the reserve. Someone who can, in some way guide, or help in anyway I could. Not as an elder but as an advisor. I still have a lot of things I still have to learn but to have that kind of respect, that kind of respect that goes along with that (Interview # 105, p.8, lines 16-18).

> Well our vice principal is a woman and what I noticed about her, is that she is not scared to come and ask for opinions from everybody. It doesn't matter if you have a degree or if you don't have a degree. She'll ask the teacher assistants, she'll ask the non-native staff, she will ask native staff with degrees. I think that's a big difference. Whereas, men will just ask the other men. Men will ask the other men who are on council. I've never seen them go talk to someone at the grass-roots level (Interview # 101, p.8, lines 27-32).

> I think our women, probably in the long-term, would make better leaders because they are more patient. And I think they are more diplomatic. I think they are better able to express the needs [of the family] because of that emotional attachment they have to family. ... I think we need to see some more women in our leadership roles on reserves. Whether they are chief, council or whatever, just try to get the balance of men and women [in leadership roles]. Because it's still quite paternalistic in our communities and there are still a lot of problems. I think our women would make better leaders. That's what I think (Interview # 102, p.11, lines 24-27).

## 4.7 No Acceptance

Participants expressed several reasons why formally educated women are frequently not accepted by the Indian reservation community. These reasons include the belief that the "white

man" is superior, the current leadership's fear of change and possible job loss, that management positions can only be held by men, the prevalence of nepotism/kinship, and envy/jealousy of their education and experience.

**The white man is superior.** Some participants noted that the white male patriarchy model was still evident, e.g., although some aboriginal women were more qualified for a certain job, the job frequently goes to a white man who had less skills than the Native female applicant.

> That is the community's fault. The belief that white males are better than Indian females. I've had that kind of thing happen to me (Interview # 105, p.7, lines 20 -21).

> We do it to ourselves with the belief that white is right. And we still have a lot of people like that. We could learn how to support our own people better, have more faith in them. Because they don't realize that when they hire them they continue to perpetuate that stereotype that the white male is much better, even though he only has a BA, and here is a woman with a Master's degree who has paid her dues and did the same thing and yet she wouldn't get the job (Interview # 105, p.7, lines 25-30).

> What I feel what they have displayed to me is that they still see the white person as a better person, a better teacher than a non-native teacher. To me they see a non-aboriginal person as better than an aboriginal person (Interview # 102, p.7, lines 6-8).

**The leadership's fear of change and possible loss of jobs.** Some participants noted that change seems to threaten the existing leadership structure, thus the male leaders are often unwilling to provide suitable employment for highly educated people on their reserves.

Formally educated women often begin to question the current leadership and insist that the logic for their decisions should be shared with, and exposed to the full membership of the band. Women in this study generally held that by questioning the leadership, they may be viewed negatively, resulting in possible job loss.

> But it is when you get away from the traditional mentality and you get to the chief and council, you get to the structure and the inepticism [sic], where everyone who runs the show is related and it is such a close knit group. When someone with an education comes into that group with new ideas it threatens that group structure and that cohesiveness. The reason it threatens it is not because these ideas are bad ideas, but because people in the community begin to listen to it and begin to question the leadership in the community. These are new identifiers of male and female roles, that is why a lot of women when they go back are completely verbally assaulted. They don't want to have anything to do with them [the abusive leaders and their supporters]. It threatens the existing structure where men usually rule rather than the matriarchal [system] when communities were so strong (Interview # 107, p.7, lines 8-17).

**Male dominated Management Positions.** Some participants noted management positions were often held by men who tended to delegate their responsibilities by having their assistants, usually women, complete their tasks. These men often tended to be conceited and self-absorbed to the point where they could not admit they were incapable of completing a certain task.

> I tend to see men use the white male model to base their leadership on, that whole ego thing not dictatorship but it is very much about ego, I think. This is the way I am going to do it because it is the right way. How dare anybody disapprove of me? Whereas [with] women, I think, it tends to be more collaborative. Women tend to, they are not big on the ego, they do it because they want to do it, it is for the greater good and it is also more consultive [sic]. Whereas men, I have had to stroke their egos and tell them what a great guy they are. I could manipulate them to get what I want (Interview # 105, p.9, lines 12-17).

In addition, these men were reportedly often unwilling to respect formally educated women by refusing to provide appropriate employment opportunities; that is they would rather hire women to be secretaries than hire them in positions of upper-management with full decision-making authority.

> I feel ... we have been guilty , as a community, [where we have given] uneducated men jobs because they qualify as men. We give them the higher positions than women who are highly educated. I think we have different standards [for men and women] that we live by than in general society. (Interview # 104, p.7, lines 16 -19).

**Nepotism/Kinship.** Some participants noted that chief and council often obtain their positions through kinship ties. Those with larger families win elections, where education and experience carry little or no weight in who is chosen for band positions. These kinship ties result in employment and other benefits channelled to the chief's relatives. Nepotism is a major influence in obtaining secure, well paid employment on the reserve.

> Working on the reserve is different, if you are related to the powers that be you will get a high paying job and job security. If you are working off-reserve your job performance and income level is based on your job performance. This is not true on the reserve. (Interview # 111, p.1, lines 18-20).

> I think it is who you are, which family you are from; when you think of it when you look at my mom's family there aren't too many voters. If you don't have too many voting members you don't have a chance (Interview # 109, p.6, lines 14-16).

**Envy/Jealousy.** Envy is a social comparison with one's peers, often resulting in a belief that one is inferior. Duffy & Shaw (2000) further define envy as follows:

> Envy is best conceptualized as a constellation of various distinguishable affective elements that typically occur during episodes of envy. Such affective reactions may include, but are not limited to, inferiority, longing, resentment of one's circumstances, shame, depression, helplessness, insecurity, frustration, and ill-will toward the envied person (p.4).

Berscheid (1994) defines jealousy as follows:

> Jealousy, generated by a threat to a previously established unique relationship with another, and social comparison jealousy or envy, the desire or attempt to possess something belonging to another individual (p.109).

Many of my respondents reported that they felt envy and jealousy from others on the reserve which was a very painful experience for them. Some stated that their objective was to obtain an education and return to the reserve to share their new skills, and some felt that this was their home and they should be employed there. For example, one respondent reported that she would like to remain employed on the reserve, but she believed that she would not receive appropriate pay once the band became her sole employer, without direction from INAC. Another woman reported that she lost her job because she asked too many questions about leadership decisions. The majority of the participants experienced an increase in negative treatment from some members of the band.

> I think, and this is my own opinion, is that when they look at themselves, they wish they could do something like that, and they weren't able to. And rather than going out there and giving it a try, they just wish ill luck on other people. It is just envy. I think it is a low self-esteem that they have and they want to pass it on to other people (Interview # 102, p.9, lines 10-13).

> Chief and council make false statements when they say they support education and encourage their people to get educated. The fact is if you get educated you are disowned by your people. People look at you differently. Jealousy is a big part of it. She was an alcoholic and switched her life over. Now she is a threat to the community. These people are hypocrites, they smile in your face and stab you in the back (Interview # 111, p.2, lines 29 -33).

> If I talk about back home I made a choice not to go back home and work. There were a lot of

> factors around that. One of them was you're going to face people that are very negative and have the attitude that you are an apple [a slang term for native people who are native but present themselves as a white person, i.e., white on the inside, red on the outside; who may not be considered to be native anymore]. All of a sudden you have become that person who has a formal education so you think [they think] you are now somewhat better than the rest of them. You would think that because the reserve wants to get their youth educated they would be more supportive of having people come back (Interview 102, p.5, lines 20-25).

> Well it is said that men feel challenged by educated women but there are also women who feel that resentment and challenge when another educated women comes into the community (Interview # 101, p.5, 26 -28).

## 4.8 Summary

This chapter highlighted the concepts of the collected data that were then categorized to prepare for the development of a theoretical understanding of the experiences of formally educated Native women in the Treaty Six region of Alberta. The following chapter expands upon these findings to place them in the context of other academic literature and to use these themes to develop grounded theory.

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

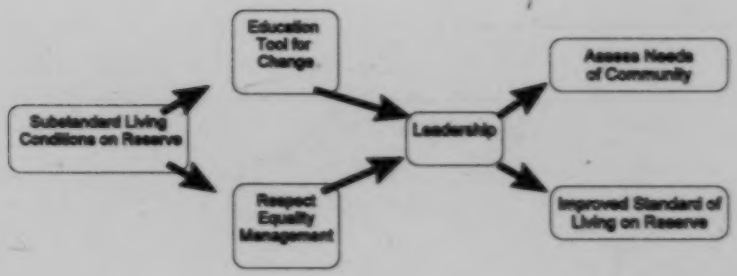
Through an examination and comparison of the literature reviewed in chapter two, and the findings in chapter four, I attempt to answer the question: What are the experiences of formally educated Aboriginal women who return to their communities to assume leadership roles? In addition, I ask the question: What are the support systems of these women and to what extent are they accepted upon their return to their home communities? This chapter discusses the findings and relates them to theoretical concepts from the literature reviewed in the second chapter. To understand the findings, it has been essential to recognize the living conditions of First Nations' reservations, and the role of education to assist with the development of healthy communities.

## 5.1 Theory Development

The grounded theory approach was taken was to explore these questions, using a combination of literature and the findings from semi-structured long interviews. First, respondents revealed that they chose education as a way to change the standard of living on reserves. The fear of assimilation through education was considered and explored in the semi-structured long interviews. Assimilation did not seem to be a factor in pursuing a formal education, in fact the findings revealed that education enhanced one's sense of native heritage. Secondly, I explained how education could make changes in the community. It was found through the literature and my findings that education can create equality, respect, and increase one's training in leadership roles. Once a leadership role is obtained, one can begin to make the

changes deemed necessary to improve the socio-economic conditions of the reservation. Traditionally, women's roles have been to provide education, to care for children, elders, and the sick and thus many women see higher education as consistent with their role to promote learning and care-giving in their community. In addition, the literature revealed that women tend to possess better communication skills, giving them the potential to become better leaders. First Nations' women are able to use their formal education to benefit First Nations' communities and feel it is connected to their nurturing role in the family. In a sense, a formal education has allowed first nation's women to come full circle: to regain her respect as deeply committed to her family, and able to regain influence in community decision-making.

*Figure One: Theory Development*



## 5.2 The Role of Education

The majority of the participants shared their experiences of growing up in poverty and their desires to change their socio-economic status through a formal education. Through the literature and the transcripts of the participants, it was revealed that a formal education provided one with the skills and experience necessary for management positions that eventually lead to leadership roles (Degen, 1985; & Lepages - Lee, 1998). Education teaches one how to communicate effectively with mainstream society (Miller 1996a). Freire (1970) calls this process 'conscientization'. Education also increases the level of respect given to these women through the demonstration of their skills and knowledge to others in the community. Some participants noticed that their input into administrative discussions was respected because those involved respected their formal knowledge about the issue and sought their guidance. Thus education has provided an avenue for women to become involved in the community decision- making process. The findings of some of the participants revealed a desire to recapture the equal relationship between men and women regarding key community decision-making roles (Caffrey, 2000; Gunn Allen, 1986; Hungry Wolf, 1996b; & Jaimes & Halsey, 1992). A formal education offers one an alternative to achieving this goal as demonstrated in the previous example.

Scholars such as Bolt (1981) have written about the role of formal education as a tool of assimilation. Interestingly, the women in this study all stated that education reinforced their identity as aboriginal women and some stated that it gave them a better understanding of their history. They felt that with a better understanding of their history they could gain a better understanding of themselves. In addition, education was viewed as an instrument to

accomplish their role as caregiver, teacher, and assist with their responsibility for the people of the community. This was demonstrated in their three key issues of concern for community development: first, programs that focus on improved social services which included after-school programs, mental health programs, and formal education upgrading programs; second, childcare programs, which included quality education programs, and involvement of elders in the schools and post-secondary education; and third, violence prevention programs, which included a focus on spousal abuse and the fact that beating ones' spouse has become commonplace and acceptable. Similar findings were noted in the studies by Poitras (1986), & Dion-Stout (1996), "given the central role played by Aboriginal women in the lives of their families, it is both ironic and tragic that so many are the victims of sexual, physical and emotional abuse at the hands of their husbands, boyfriends and male relatives" (p.27). Although, the participants were not questioned about violence, the majority discussed it and stated that violence is a real concern.

Some research suggests that Aboriginal women are more likely to pursue a post-secondary education in business, administration or management fields (DIAND, 1996a; Dion-Stout, 1996), whereas the respondents in this study revealed a preference for the care-giving professions. The women in this study generally worked in the areas of teaching or social work. These choices of profession correspond with their desires to address their three key issues of concern; social programs, childcare, and violence awareness.

What is of particular interest in the findings is that although some of these women were unable to secure employment in their original communities, they were able to influence programs in Aboriginal communities through their responsibilities at work. This was done by securing

employment in provincial or federal level programs that service First Nations. It would appear that having input into community decision-making is a shared value for indigenous women seeking a higher education.

A formal education has provided the women in this study with enhanced interpersonal skills as demonstrated through their choice of professions as teachers and social workers. For example, as teachers and social workers these women have become trained and experienced in interpersonal communication. Consequently they believe they have better communication skills that make it easier for them to contribute to community development since they have a direct contact with the people that need the most help. As such, these women were able to assess the situation of the community through the experiences of the people. In effect their personalized approach where these women work, make them better suited for leadership roles, or at least for their opinions to be respected.

### 5.3 Support Systems

Women in this study held that their formal education served to support and enhance their native identity and understanding of their heritage. The findings revealed that some of the participants, through courses taken at the University, were able to gain a better understanding of the history of their people. In addition, academics at colleges and universities (Dion-Stout, 1996) have recently been taking measures to try to correct some of the Euro-centric pedagogy that was revealed in the 1996 Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal People (Canada,

1996a). These efforts have striven to formally recognize aboriginal people as partners in the development of Canada[18].

Overwhelmingly, the findings revealed that the women were supported by immediate family in the areas of finances, childcare, and emotional encouragement. This was also reflected in Lepages-Lees (1998) research on disadvantaged women's pursuit of higher education that "each [woman] was nurtured and encouraged by strong family members and occasionally by professionals, such as teachers" (1998, p.2). Although the author is referring to African American women, these findings can be applied to the participants in this study.

In addition, the findings revealed that the leadership; that is, chief and council, support education as part of their political platforms, but not the hiring of their educated membership. My study indicates that some formally educated women are not readily accepted back in to their home communities. There are exceptions, these being when aboriginal women have strong kinship ties to chief and council, or have accepted an entry-level position.

A strong belief in spirituality was also listed as a key support system in the findings. Some noted that their decision to pursue a formal education was predetermined by a higher power or omnipresent being. The participants stated that this 'power' provided assistance through difficult times in their lives while they were pursuing their education. This was not noted in any of the literature on the factors that influence the desire and ability for aboriginal women to pursue a higher education.

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[18]Canadian legislature recognized June 21 as National Aboriginal Day.

Spirituality is an important factor in assessing community development. Cultural values include the whole-ness of a person; that is, a person consists of four parts. These parts of the self include physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. In order for an individual to be healthy each part must be respected and cared for. Baird-Olson & Ward (2000) further explain this concept in comparison to European religion as:

> The concept of religion is used to distinguish the Eurocentric institutionalization of spiritual beliefs and practices from the concept of spirituality, representing more fluid traditional Native American practises which involve personal interpretations of vison quests, dreams, and life experiences. The traditional ethos is holistic: the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual realms of life are not compartmentalized or rank-ordered (p.7).

As such, spirituality is a key component of support which assisted these women to complete their studies and fulfil their traditional role in the community. Through my study the importance of spirituality was revealed as being a vital part of completing one's degree and overcoming the odds of failing:

> We find our strength and our power in our ability to be what our grandmothers were to us: keepers of the next generation in every sense of that word - physically, intellectually, and spiritually. We strive to retain our power and interpret it into all aspects of survival on this earth in the midst of chaos. It is the fierce love at the centre of our power that is the weapon our grandmothers gave to us, to protect and to nurture against all odds ( Armstrong, 1996 , p.xi).

## 5.4 Ingroup Non-Acceptance

Intergroup relations must be considered when examining the relationships between highly educated First Nations' women and their return to their home communities:

> To the extent that subtle forms of bias present invisible but substantial barriers that prevent passive equal employment opportunity programs from achieving equitable outcomes, attention also needs to be given to addressing this bias in a larger context – in the climate of intergroup relations within the organization and society (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1996, p. 68).

One of the arising difficulties between the individual and the organization is the difficulty to obtain secure employment, which is dependent on both the band membership and job availability. The findings have shown that in most cases, regarding the employability of the women in this study, there are few secure positions on their reserves since employment opportunities are dependant on who is elected to leadership positions. Elections tend to occur on short term basis resulting in a rapidly changing political climate. That is, one may obtain or lose their employment based on who wins the election. In addition, the majority of those elected tend to be men who may believe that women have inferior leadership skills as compared to non-native and native men. Nepotism and jealousy are key factors in determining employment accessibility and retention. In the instances where participants were employed on a reservation in an appropriate position, they reported unfair treatment of themselves and other well-educated women.

Women in this study reported a belief by some males and females, on the reservation, that women are inferior to men, especially to non-native men (NWAC, 1991). This could be the result of generations of attempts to assimilate aboriginal people through colonialism:

> It was their [Jesuit Priests] stated objective to colonize the "savage" "Indians," to christianize them and thus to incorporate them as controllable/exploitable loyal citizens of the new French colony. One of the major forces of colonization focussed on the re-training of Native women and men (specifically the Huron and Montagnais cultures) with respect to gender relations... Achieved through ideological transformation and backed up by coercion: " ... powerful mechanisms of punishment and intimidation such as imprisonment and beatings ...for women who did not submit, women's role within Native cultures was effectively colonized into an oppressive patriarchal model (Wise Harris, 1990-91, p.15).

Colonialism was also cited in the works of Hedican (1991) and Lee (1992) as encouraging a patriarchal system. Crowfoot (1997) continues to reiterate the negative consequences of colonialism when he stated, "... the legacy of the federal government's colonial regime continues to be felt to this day as a deliberating force which tears at the very social fabric of community" (1997, p.300) . The effects of patriarchy continue to be demonstrated in the findings. Women in this study reported that employment positions often went to less qualified non-native men, then to aboriginal women, even when Aboriginal women were more educated and experienced than non-native male applicants. In the event that these women do not obtain employment they do not completely leave their communities but stay involved at a voluntary level or a state level.

In addition, the top management positions tend to be held by men. These positions include chief and council, and band administrators, some of whom abuse their power:

> The problem of distrust is also made worse by the fact that some chiefs and councillors have, unquestionably, abused their powers. Some have stolen from the tribal funds, cheated in

> elections, travelled excessively and lavishly on tribal business, or otherwise exhibited low moral standards such that tribal members conclude that the First Nation politicians are out to exploit the tribe and achieve self-aggrandizement (Crowfoot, 1997, p. 309).

The women in this study reported similar abuses of power in the reserves they worked in or with. Some educated women return to their communities and begin to question the leadership. Subsequently, educated aboriginal women begin to advocate for increased accountability in leadership, especially regarding budgetary spending. Sometimes the leadership is uncomfortable with being questioned and the women are rejected. These women are often verbally abused and threatened.

The literature also reports that Aboriginal women are rejected by their communities or feel a loss of respect for their traditional roles in community decision-making when they question the leadership (Archibald, 1994; Faith et al., 1990; & Fiske, 1990-1991).

Given the importance of kinship ties on reservations, nepotism is common in hiring practices. This is evident in the literature (Miller, 1997; & Bell, et al, 1993) and in the findings. The respondents reported the importance of kinship ties for accessing resources. One is more likely to access these resources if they have strong kinship ties to the people in upper management positions. Apparently, if one has strong kinship ties to the leadership regardless of education and experience they are more likely to obtain secure employment.

Jealousy and envy are also issues for women who have obtained a higher education and seek employment on the reserve. The literature did not address the discouraging influences of jealousy and envy from others as women try to pursue careers on the reserve. The findings

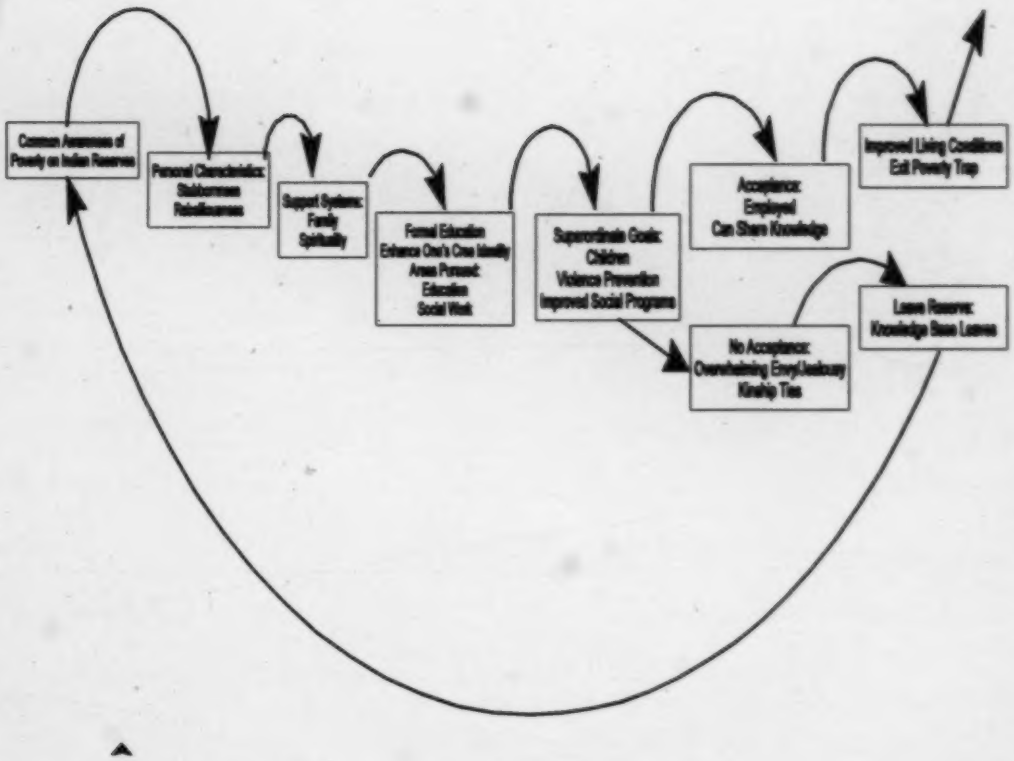
noted that some of the participants experienced negative treatment from some of the band members and stated that these people were jealous of their accomplishments. In the study by Crowfoot (1997) jealousy, envy, and family pride were also listed as sources undermining the development of reserves. These areas of nepotism and jealousy seem to be common issues to consider when examining issues on the reservation for the regions selected in this study.

### 5.4.1 Acceptance

My findings suggest that while the immediate family is generally supportive of aboriginal women's higher education, the reserve community is often not supportive. The literature and the findings both indicate that aboriginal women tend to seek a formal education to obtain leadership roles in order to ensure the needs of women, elders and children are met. They are often encouraged and supported by their home communities *while they are students*. They tend to seek education in the areas of management, and while employed in a care-giving professional position, they seek out a position to have a more significant impact on the community. This management style utilizes the collaborative approach to community development by seeking input from the collective (Muller, 1998; & Schwartz, 1989). One participant explained that one of her administrators, a Cree woman, often sought the advice from various employees from maintenance personnel to teachers. On this basis, participants in this study reported that women would make better managers because of their increased levels of formal education, their genuine concern for the collective, their virtue of patience, and collaborative decision-making skills. The literature and the findings demonstrate the potential

expertise aboriginal women have in management roles in creating an improved community. However, accessing these management positions can be very difficult as these women are often rejected and suffer negative treatment from their communities.

## FIGURE 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK


Common Awareness of Poverty on Indian Reserves
Personal Characteristics: Stubbornness Rebelliousness
Support Systems: Family Spirituality
Formal Education Enhance One's Own Identity Areas Pursued: Education Social Work
Superordinate Goals: Children Violence Prevention Improved Social Programs
Acceptance: Employed Can Share Knowledge
Improved Living Conditions Exit Poverty Trap
No Acceptance: Overwhelming Envy/Jealousy Kinship Ties
Leave Reserve: Knowledge Base Leaves

It is an established fact that First Nations reserves exist in substandard conditions (Romaniuc, 2000; & Warburton, 1997). The women in this study grew up in substandard conditions which instilled a desire to improve their standard of living by obtaining a formal education. These women shared the personal characteristics of "stubbornness and rebelliousness". These women identified these characteristics as being instrumental to their success. Stubbornness can also be interpreted as being tenacious or as being determined, and rebelliousness can be interpreted as revolutionary. I used the terms stubbornness and rebelliousness because these are the terms the women in my study repeatedly used to describe themselves. These women were able to successfully complete their degrees with the support of their families and a strong spiritual belief system. A formal education became a source of Cree identity enhancement, rather than an educational experience that diminished their Cree identity. The areas of professional pursuit included education and social work, which reflects traditional roles of teaching and ensuring the continuation of the community. Consequently the superordinate goals of these women included childcare/education, violence prevention programs, and improved social programming.

This framework identified two possible paths for community development; one which allows for the acceptance of these women in suitable employment positions; and two, one which does not accept these women back resulting in the loss of potentially valuable human resources. Educated women who left the reserve cited problems with envy, jealousy, or being blocked from certain positions due to their unfavorable position within the kinship system. Incidently this research has shown that although some educated Native women may not secure

employment on the reserve, they continued to be involved in the community at either a voluntary or state-employed level.

## 5.5 Potential Areas for Exploration

There are numerous studies done to establish that a formal education leads to an increase in income and therefore an increase in the standard of living. However, further study is required to establish if and how a First Nations' reservation benefits from women obtaining a higher education and employment in upper management level positions. The findings revealed that of the eleven participants, only four were able to secure employment on a reserve, three of which were on their home reserves. The remainder continued to be involved on a volunteer basis or at a state level where they provided input regarding decisions about First Nations' communities' access to resources.

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

The dynamic and complex social interaction experiences of in-group social support and acceptance of Aboriginal women, in the Treaty Six region, were explored in this study. The objectives of this study were to answer the following questions: Why do First Nations women pursue a formal University or College education?; Has a formal education changed their identity as Cree women?; How were these women received by their communities upon their return after completing a University or College program?; Did these women receive support from the communities in which they obtained employment? Would these women be comfortable in making any generalizations about the kinds of issues that are of particular importance to First Nations women in their reserves? Through an in-depth examination of the interviews of Aboriginal women and current literature, this study fulfilled these objectives. This qualitative research utilizing grounded theory revealed social and political processes that provided a greater context for understanding the experiences of formally educated First Nations women.

## 6.1 Summary of Findings

First Nations women pursue an education to improve their standard of living and to accommodate the expectations of family members. In addition, a few believed it was predetermined by a higher power - - "the Creator". Accordingly, spirituality played a significant role in their lives and became a major source of emotional support (see 4.3). These women chose to pursue an education in the context where statistically, they were more likely

to withdraw from a formal education at a grade nine level (DIAND, 1996a). They have limited access to resources, and upper management positions. They tended to have children and extended families tocare for. Regardless, they pursued a formal education in order to return to their communities and attempt to change the community's current socio-economic conditions. Sub-standard living conditions provide strong motivation for these women to pursue an education. The families of these women were very supportive of their decisions to attend a university or college and some families expected them to obtain a higher education.

I learned in this study that a formal education served to enhance their identity as Cree women. A formal education cultivated a greater compassion for Cree people, and in some ways, more self acceptance (see 4.4). At one time in Canadian history, if a Treaty Indian was admitted to a Canadian university or college they were entitled to be enfranchised which meant they were no longer considered an Indian (Section 86, Chapter 43 of the 1886 Indian Act which eventually was repealed). However, the stigma of becoming a "white person" when you became formally educated was evident in this study (see 4.4). The women in this study overcame the residual effects of this section of the Indian Act by obtaining a formal education, retaining their Cree heritage, and returning to the reserve.

The majority of the women in this study were unable to obtain employment on their reserve and expressed their concerns for lack of opportunity and rejection (see 4.6). Although formal education was supported by the chief, council, and community there was an unwillingness to provide employment opportunities. The reasons cited included a lack of employment opportunities and rejection from chief and council. The lack of employment opportunities revolved around the limited resources available on reserves and the rejection stemmed from

in-group behaviour as manifested in envy and jealousy. The study found that kinship, envy and jealousy were key determinants for obtaining employment. Band members with strong kinship ties to chief and council received employment. Envy and jealousy appears to be based on a social comparison of personal achievements and characteristics. The women in this study expressed that it was an emotionally painful experience to be rejected by their communities, and in some cases their own relatives.

When asked to generalize about the issues of greatest importance to them, they listed three main areas of concern: childcare, violence and social programs that focussed on the well-being of the individual (see 4.5). Childcare and education of children was a concern because this was often the responsibility of the women. Although generally women in this study had spouses, they were often responsible for childcare and their child's education, which corresponds with their traditional roles. The women stated that it was difficult to find daycare for their children while they worked, and if there was daycare, it was inadequate. Also, they expressed a concern for education because it is not viewed as a priority, and funds designated for the education budget are often spent on other areas. Violence was also listed as a priority issue to be addressed. The respondents stated that violence is very commonplace on the reserve and they were very concerned that it was becoming socially acceptable, particularly spousal abuse. Social programs were supported by the majority of the women in this study. A minority discussed the importance of economic development. The women stated that a strong, healthy individual will provide a stronger workforce, therefore the focus of development should be on addressing community social problems through elder's programs, women's wellness centres, after-school care programs, and substance abuse programs (see 4.5).

## 6.2 Policy Recommendations

These findings suggest that First Nations women face numerous obstacles to obtain a formal education. However with economic and social support, provided by family members, along with spiritual support they are able to overcome these obstacles. They sought to be influential role models in their communities and provide other women and girls with options to improve their standard of living. Although the women reported a prevalent belief on the reserves that a formal education destroys the 'Cree' identity, these women demonstrate that a formal education can enhance one's 'Cree' heritage and provide one with additional survival skills. The Treaty Six negotiations specifically state that education be provided by the federal government, and this obligation is being addressed. Given the importance of a formal education to alleviating the sub-standard living conditions on the reserve, I recommend that access to formal education which addresses the specifics of Cree culture, become a priority.

In addition women in this study expressed a desire to obtain upper management positions in order to have direct input into the community decision-making processes. Three key areas of concern have been identified: childcare programs, social programs and violence prevention programs. The women in the study stated that with healthy individuals the community can begin to change. Current social programs tend to become secondary to economic development programs given the provincial governments encouragement of these programs (Alberta Aboriginal Affairs, 2000). However these highly educated and experienced women have the belief that there is a need for social programs, therefore social programs should continue to be implemented. The higher formal education levels and experiences of working directly with the people in their roles as teachers, social workers, and cultural co-ordinators makes these women

ideal for upper management positions in social and education programs. Therefore, I recommend that these women be provided with access to upper management positions which are based on levels of education and experience. These communities should adopt policies that facilitate the reintegration of formally educated First Nations women back into their reserves and provide some standards for employment equity, especially in regards to hiring practices.

The issue of kinship needs to be addressed, as it was suggested in this study that the larger families tend to dominate the upper management positions of chief and council. The results of these kinship ties are evident in the employed positions on the reserve, often held by immediate relatives. In addition, the political environment can change very rapidly; that is, an election can be held yearly or bi-yearly resulting in numerous campaign promises that include employment placement. These communities should adopt a clan based system of representation.

In addition, I recommend that the federal and provincial governments provide special funds for women-led social programs. Women running these programs will fit the criteria in which they possess a formal education, and develop and implement appropriate social programs that address the needs of women and children. These programs would be run independent of chief and council and would be supervised by a Band elected board that represents each family group.

## 6.3 Future Research Directions

Life on First Nations reserves is complex and unique. It is unique because of the negotiations of the original inhabitants with the first government of Canada, which resulted in the federally developed "Indian Act". This act oversees various aspects of political, social and economic conditions on reserves. First Nations women are directly affected as it determines their identity as Treaty Indians. Further research could explore the role of women in management on reserves, and their political influence. I recommend further research be conducted on First Nations women managers, hypothesizing that women make better managers because of their inherent skills as good listeners and their direct contact with community members.

The traditional roles and responsibilities for First Nations women was to ensure the well-being of their family and indirectly the well-being of the community. The traditional roles and responsibilities and their contemporary counterpart warrants further exploration, in regards to how educated women support and enhance contemporary Cree culture.

This study noted that these women believed a formal education enhanced their identity as Cree women, which provided a foundation on which to begin the process of changing the socio-economic status of their reserves. Their education and employment experiences allowed these women to become aware of the sub-standard social and economic status of most community members. Consequently they developed a desire to obtain upper management positions to attempt to undo social inequalities. Each of the women in this study stated that they would like upper management positions, such as the chief, band councillor, or band administrator positions. The reasons sited for their selection were to have a direct input into the allocation

of funds and to ensure that the funds designated for various programs, went to those programs (see 4.6). Although these women were skilled, experienced and knowledgeable-access to upper management positions was almost impossible. I recommend a long term study to examine the effects of formal education on community development to further test the premise that a formal education creates an educated and experienced work force that can begin to alleviate poverty on reserves. Being that there are more Native women seeking a formal education, the role of gender and employment in upper management positions should be examined.

## 6.4 Concluding Remarks

There are a number of dimensions to examine when exploring the experiences of First Nations women. This study attempted to explore the experiences of formally educated First Nations in-group social support and acceptance. These First Nations women received support from their families, chief and council to obtain a university or college degree. However, they are not well received upon their return to the reserves. All of the women in this study attempted, and some secured, employment on a First Nation reserve. The majority were rejected. The significance of this finding is that these women chose to return to the reserve rather than securing employment in mainstream society. Also, they remained involved with their communities when they were not hired by the reserve, at either a voluntary or state-employed level.

The theoretical framework of this study indicated that if formally educated First Nations women are employed in positions that complements their education and experience level, the standard of living on the reserve will improve; thus benefiting the whole community. If they are not employed, or employed at an inappropriate level, they are more likely to leave the reserve and seek employment elsewhere, resulting in the community losing one of it's primary resources: highly educated and experienced people.

The completion of this study contributes to the understanding the complex and dynamic experiences of First Nations women by exploring their education and employment experiences. The women in this study indicated that they would be suited to upper management positions based on their level of formal education and experience, and their traditional roles and responsibilities for their families and communities. In this chapter I have made many recommendations based on the findings and discussion chapters of this study. However, in order for these recommendations to succeed the community has to understand and accept them, they need to recognize the value of education and experience and adopt it as an appropriate aspect of Cree culture.

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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:

**Formally Educated First Nations Women in the Treaty Six Region of Alberta: In-Group Social Acceptance and Support.**

I acknowledge that the research procedures described on the Information sheet attached and of which I have a copy has been explained to me, and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that approximately two hours of my time may be required and I will not be paid for this interview. In addition, I know that I may contact the person designated on the form, if I have further questions now or in the future. I have been assured that I am free to stop the interview at any time. I understand that I may be contacted in the future for a follow-up interview and a summary of the research findings will be sent to me. I understand that I will remain anonymous in any write-up of the research results, and also not identified by the community in which I live. If you desire, I will send you a summary of the findings upon completion of this research and my analysis.

_____ _____

(Name) (Signature)

The people who may be contacted about the research are:

Tracey Poitras-Collins
B.Sc., B.Ed., & M.Sc. Candidate
(403) 394-1511

Dr. N. Krogman
(780) 492-4178
University of Alberta
Department of Rural Economy

Phone No.: _____

_____
(Date)

_____
(Signature of Investigator)

## APPENDIX B : INFORMATION SHEET

**Formally Educated First Nations Women in the Treaty Six Region of Alberta: In-Group Social Acceptance and Support.**

This is an exploratory study designed to learn about community acceptance and support of formally educated First Nations women in their communities. Ideally, I would like to document First Nations women's experiences in terms of the community's acceptance, rejection, and support for higher educated women. I am also interested in the priorities for Aboriginal women leaders within their communities, and how they have been able to use their leadership and education to improve community development. It is my intention that this research will be used by First Nation communities to assist women in obtaining and using a higher education in First Nations. I may try to publish this research to provide other researchers, educators, and community leaders with reading material that they can find in a general library search on this topic.

In order to document your experiences and stories I ask to record your interview. During the interview I will ask you a series of questions accompanied with this information sheet. These questions are designed to help you recall experiences and stories that would be appropriate for this study. This interview should take approximately 1 -2 hours; however, it is not limited to this time frame. You are free to stop the interview at any time. I will be happy to provide you with a summary of the research results and copies of any publications that originate from this research.

Sincerely,

---

Tracey Poitras-Collins
Investigator

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW SHEET

**Formally Educated First Nations Women in the Treaty Six Region of Alberta: In-Group Social Acceptance and Support.**

**Participant Identification:**

*Name (code number):* _____

*Place of residence:*

_____

*Length of residence (years) on this reservation, if applicable:* _____

*First Nation member of which band:*

_____

*Mailing address*: _____

*Contact phone number*:

_____

*Additional contact information:*

_____

*(email address, cellular phone number, facsimile number)*

*Date and place of interview:*_

---

**Background/ Demographic Information**

Current Occupation: _____

Place of employment, or previous place of employment if applicable:

Is this with a band? _____

Is this with a treaty six organization? If yes, which one?_____

Income earned at this job, please circle the appropriate category:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 15, 000 - 20, 000 | 31,000 - 35,000 | 46,000 - 50,000 | 61,000 + |
| 21,000 - 25, 000 | 36,000 - 40,000 | 51,000 - 55,000 | |
| 26,000 - 30,000 | 41,000 - 45,000 | 56,000- 60,000 | |

Type and field of formal education: (University, college or technical)

_____

Where was this degree earned from?_____

Date you received your higher education degree:_____

Birth place: _____

What is your birth order? _____

How many siblings do you have? _____

What is your age? Please circle the appropriate category:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 18 - 25 | 31 - 35 | 41 - 45 | 51 - 55 6561- |
| 26 - 30 | 36 - 40 | 46 - 50 | 56 - 60 |

Did you grow up on or off the reserve? _____

What is your marital status ( legally married (and not separated), separated but still legally married, divorced, widowed, never married, common-law)?

_____

Do you have children? _____

If you do, how many do you have? _____

What are the ages of your children?

_____

Do you have children who are 18 and dependant on you? _____

Residence patterns:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Childhood : | urban | rural |
| School years | urban | rural |
| Secondary schooling: | urban | rural |
| Post secondary schooling: | urban | rural |

*The next section of the interview is divided into 4 areas: Self-reflection, Acceptance, Support, and Leadership.*

**Key Questions: Self-Reflection**

Was it difficult to leave the rural setting for an urban one to obtain your schooling?

Has your formal education changed your identity as a Cree person? If so, how?

Could you reflect on some of your personal characteristics that made it possible for you to obtain a higher education?

Could you also reflect on some of the surrounding conditions that made it possible for you to obtain a higher education?

**Acceptance**

After you received your formal education and returned to your community how were you received by other community members? ( Chief and Council, your place of employment, your neighbors, other women and men in your community)

Did you have an offer of employment, from your band or another band, before you completed your degree? If yes, was this offer from your home community?

How in general is a higher education perceived on your Reserve? Did you feel it was necessary to present yourself in a certain way to improve the level of acceptance from others?

Has your education challenged your role as a Native woman? Does higher education of Native women upset traditional gender roles?

**Support**

Did you feel general support from the surrounding community upon your return to the reserve after you obtained a higher education?

In what ways has your community supported you to share your skills and knowledge with the rest of the community (consultation on band decisions in your area of expertise, placement in organizations that deal with your area, grassroots women's organizations seeking your involvement)?

How could the community better support Aboriginal women who have obtained a higher education?

Ideally, what position would you eventually like to hold on the Reserve?

Are there any limitations you must overcome prior to obtaining this position? Could you please describe these?

**Leadership Focus**

Do you see any particular differences in leadership styles between First Nation women and men?

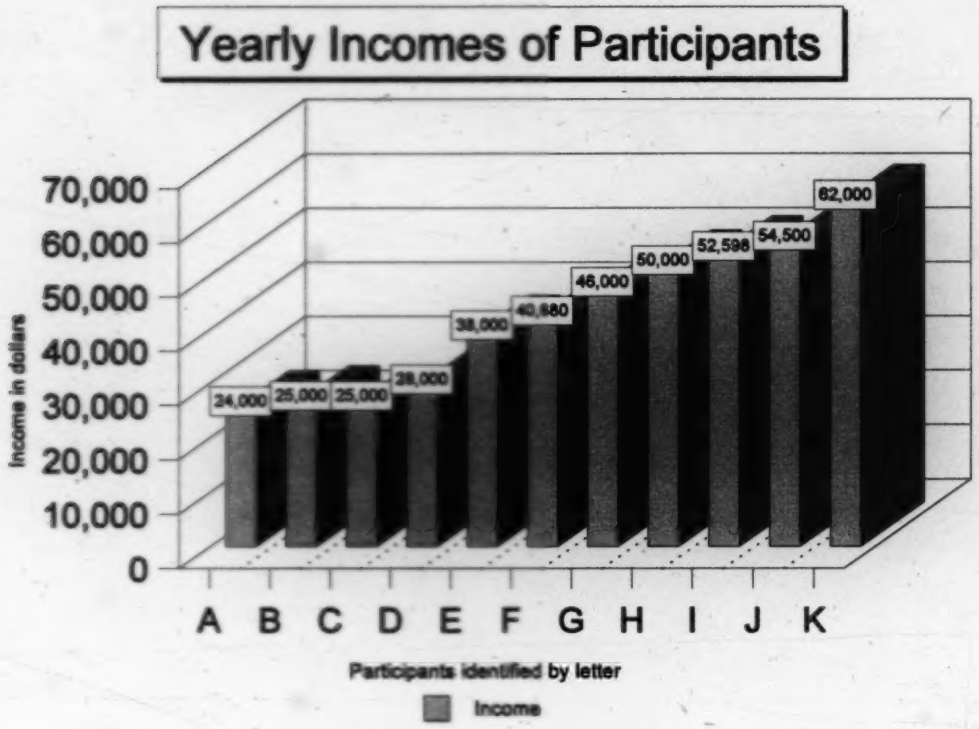
Would you be comfortable in making any generalizations about the kinds of issues that are of particular importance to First Nation women in your reserve? What are these issues?

Where do you believe the greatest emphasis should be placed for community development (economic, education, health, other social programs, etc.) on your reserve?

## APPENDIX D: AGES OF PARTICIPANTS

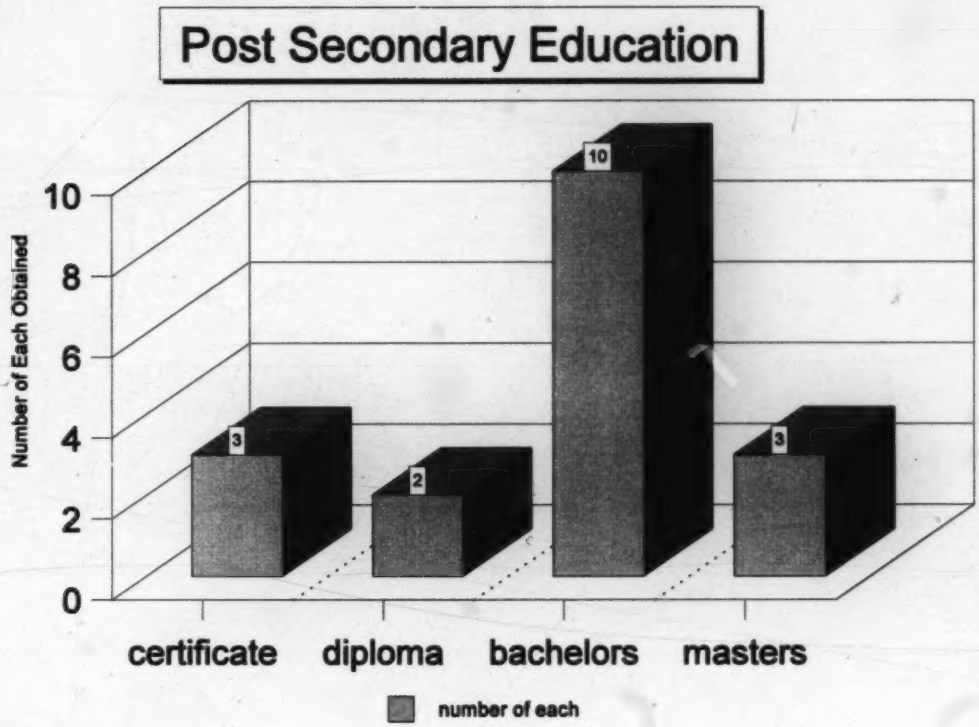
Average age: 40.36 years
Median age: 32 years
Standard deviation: 12.43

## APPENDIX E: YEARLY INCOME OF PARTICIPANTS




Average income: $ 40,525.27
Median income: $ 54,500.00
Standard Deviation: $ 12,934.76

## APPENDIX F: POST SECONDARY EDUCATION




Note: This is for a total of 11 participants, some hold multiple degrees.